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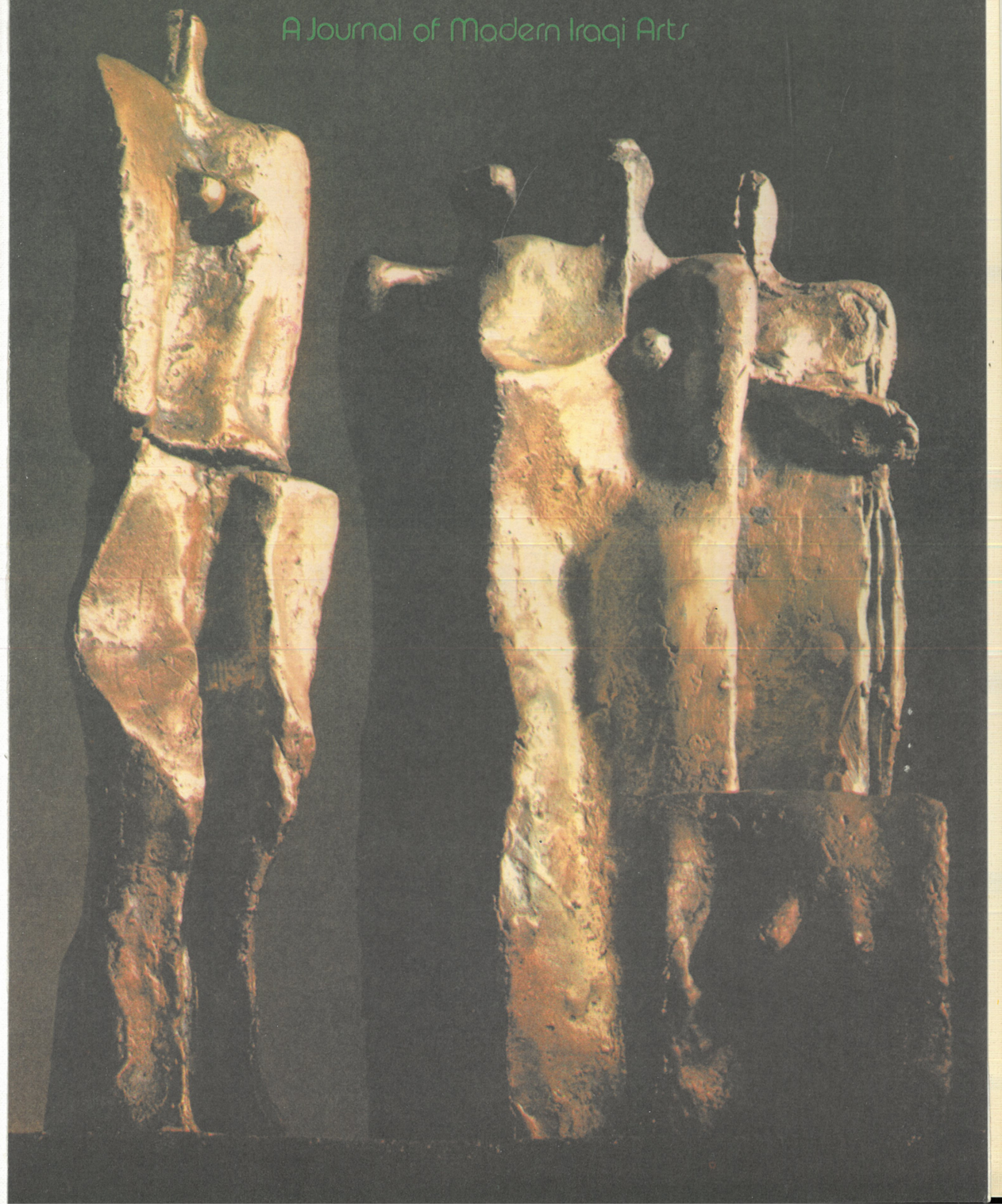
GILGAMESH

A Journal of Modern Iraqi Arts



A Symbol of Eternity

Naji Al-Hadithi

The human desire for life and eternity has inspired Iraqi artists since a long time ago. More than five thousand years ago, the Sumerian poet who wrote Gilgamesh showed ancient Iraqis' desire for life, and for eternity through a long and difficult struggle against the hardships of nature.

The same idea of seeking eternity and adhering to life has inspired many Iraqi artists, poets, novelists, writers, philosophers and thinkers who expressed their views in various forms and with various means throughout Iraq's history.

It is this very idea that inspired the Iraqi artist Ismail Fattah who expressed his view with yet another means, (ceramics) and in yet another form: (the Islamic dome) in his Martyr Monument in Baghdad (pp.7 - 18).

Designed to commemorate those Iraqis who fell in the fighting against Iran's war of aggression since September 4, 1980, the Martyr Monument expressed this artist's view that those Iraqis, by fighting — and dying — for life, have in fact fought off death which had been besetting their land and kith and kin. In so doing, they had sought eternity in the hardest and most costly — yet most profound — way. Therefore, he felt that his contribution to Iraqi man's pursuit of eternity is to make a work of art that eternalize those who laid down their lives in the cause of human life and eternity.

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Front cover : Ismail Fattah, *Group of Women,* Bronze Sculpture
Back cover : Glazed Tile Relief from Babylon
Inside front and back covers: Sumerian Terracotta

Poetry and short story drawings by Nouri al-Rawi

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A Journal of Modern Iraqi Arts

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Highly gifted, competent and perfectionist, Ismail Fattah is quite capable of transforming his solid material into an expression of vitalism. The Martyr Monument in Baghdad is an excellent example.

To shed some light on his diversified experience and changing style, a critical study is presented in this issue together with a debate with the artist about his beginnings and the various stages of his career.

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One way of knowing an artist's works is through searching for anything which reflects, though partially, his way of thinking especially in the early years of his career. Extracts from journals of Iraq's great artist, the late Jewad Selim, are presented here as an attempt to read through the artist's mind during a critical period of his career.

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There was a time when people used cuneiform characters as a form and claytablets as a medium for recording their thoughts and ideas. Now and for the first time a complete library with more than 2000 cuneiform-inscribed tablets has been found in Sippar near Babylon. It is believed to be the world's oldest library.

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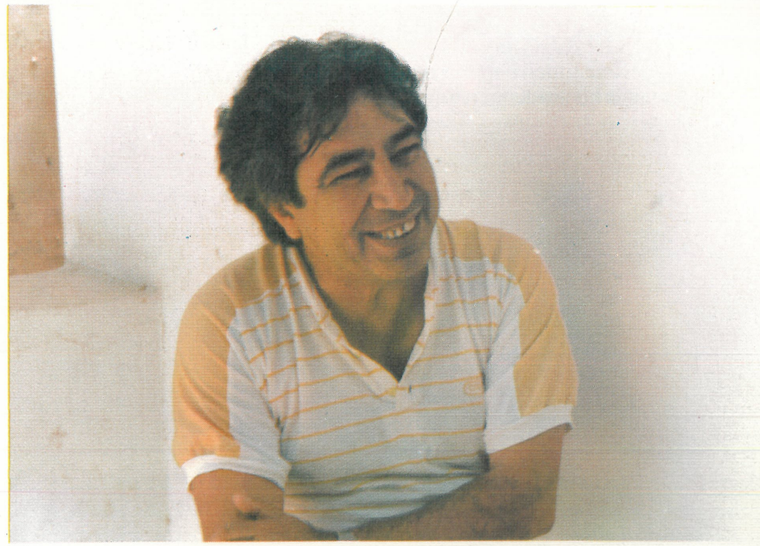
Babylon International Festival is one of the great events to take place in Iraq this year. Preparations for the Festival involved the reconstruction of the ancient city of Babylon where tens of musical activities will be presented by world famous groups.

Price: ID 1/- US$ 4.00

Ismail Fattah

The Celestial and the Earthly

May Mudhaffar



Sculpture to the Greek was a supreme art, difficult to accomplish and even more difficult to appreciate. It demanded highly talented artists. Modern sculpture confronted the artists with problematic complications, as the freedom of vision required a highly imaginative power and a deep intellectual conception of things.

Modern sculpture in Iraq, no wonder, remained slagging behind, compared to painting and its wide progress, in spite of the fact that Iraq has a rich heritage of ancient sculpture which is both great and unique.

Among the very few prominent Iraqi sculptors, Ismail Fattah may now stand on top. An artist highly gifted, competent and perfectionist, reluctant and unprolific, Ismail Fattah is quite capable of transforming his solid material into an expression of vitalism. It is this very quality that make the work of art true and eternal, and it is the main thrust of this study about Ismail Fattah and his art.

In the International Exhibition held in Baghdad (October-November 1986) Ismail Fattah, in an attempt to combine painting with sculpture, introduced three figurative works: two standing figures, natural size, and one reclining head, executed in white gypsum but painted with broad hard splashes of colour. Those works which stood among other international exhibits were attractive enough to catch the attention of nearly all visitors regardless of their cultural background. The statues were simply expressive, provocative and omnipotent. This attractive element inherent in the art work and which has no specific definition is perhaps the hidden force in the art work which makes its presence alive. It is but this penetration into reality and the beauty of expression that make art look true and vital.

In a true work of art, it is the fundamental experience that moves the conscious; if the inner feelings are not moved, the experience will remain insignificant, therefore the mind is moved by the quality of

Haifa Street Monument (Maquette)

emotions which lead to the highest inner enjoyment. That inner enjoyment is what one really gets out of looking at Ismail's art works.

To evaluate an experience as diversified as that of Ismail Fattah, one gets rather puzzled. The artist who created a sublime abstract monument like the Martyr's is the same who introduced the dull academic image of Al-Rusafi (the Iraqi poet). In the time between this and that he produced other significant academic works namely Abu Nuwas and Al-Wasiti. Meanwhile he kept on experimenting with his own stylistic figurative forms which reflect his own visual concept.

Ismail Fattah's artistic career is simply a reflection of his own character. He is restless, highly strung, enthusiastic, dynamic and elusive. His nature, free and spontaneous is very well represented in his freely composed figures. At the same time Ismail Fattah can become totally serene and calm in his academic works where he can only hold on strictly to the given form. That makes one wonder whether this artist is mainly moved by a specific sense of form through which he conceives the idea, or that the suggested subject imposes on him its conditions? Through investigating the artist's own experience it seems that he rather follows the idea of the subject and realizes it not through his own visual conception, but by strictly following the limitation imposed on such subject.

In Baghdad, Ismail Fattah was a student of the late Jewad Selim, the spiritual father of modern Iraqi art. He was very much influenced by his dynamic mind and modern theories during the 1950s. He was also influenced by Khalid Al-Rahhal and his vitally expressive art. When he later joined the Academy in Rome, he became confronted with an entirely different world. He was practicing painting and sculpture likewise. In fact his first exhibition held in Baghdad following his return in 1965 showed a collection of drawings and paintings only. But Ismail Fattah soon neglected painting to devote his time completely to sculpture. Yet his individual character as a sculptor was not finally realized until he became acquainted with Henry Moore and the modern English sculpture. "Henry Moore made me realize certain essential facts," said the artist. He further stated that his early sculptures obviously carried the influence of Kenneth Armitage. As a result the artist began to view the ancient Iraqi masterpieces with a fresh view, reappreciating the freedom and dynamism contained in the Sumerian art. Ismail, since that time became better aware of the essential values of tradition and its implementation on modern art work. Nevertheless, Western art apparently is far more rooted in his experience.

Ismail Fattah has always been concerned with man and his cause; therefore he relied on figurative expression in reflecting the human condition which he emphatically portrays in a certain state of anxiety and restlessness.

Influenced by his growing awareness and consciousness of all the artistic values, old and new, national and international, Ismail Fattah arrived at his present visual concept. His portrayal of the human figure is reflected in postures that manifest its psychological as well as physical conditions, thus creating a mood full of poetical connotations. The suspended round figure and its relevant relief work which decorate the elevation of Iraq Insurance Company building (Khullani Square) Baghdad, may stand as one of the best examples of his work. He also executed a number of large and small scale sculptures of similar style. He casts in bronze and cultivates surface qualities on his figurative forms which are oftenly fixed on certain geometric element such as a mass or an empty square. Other motifs surrounding these forms may be found here and there usually inspired by traditional or popular symbols.

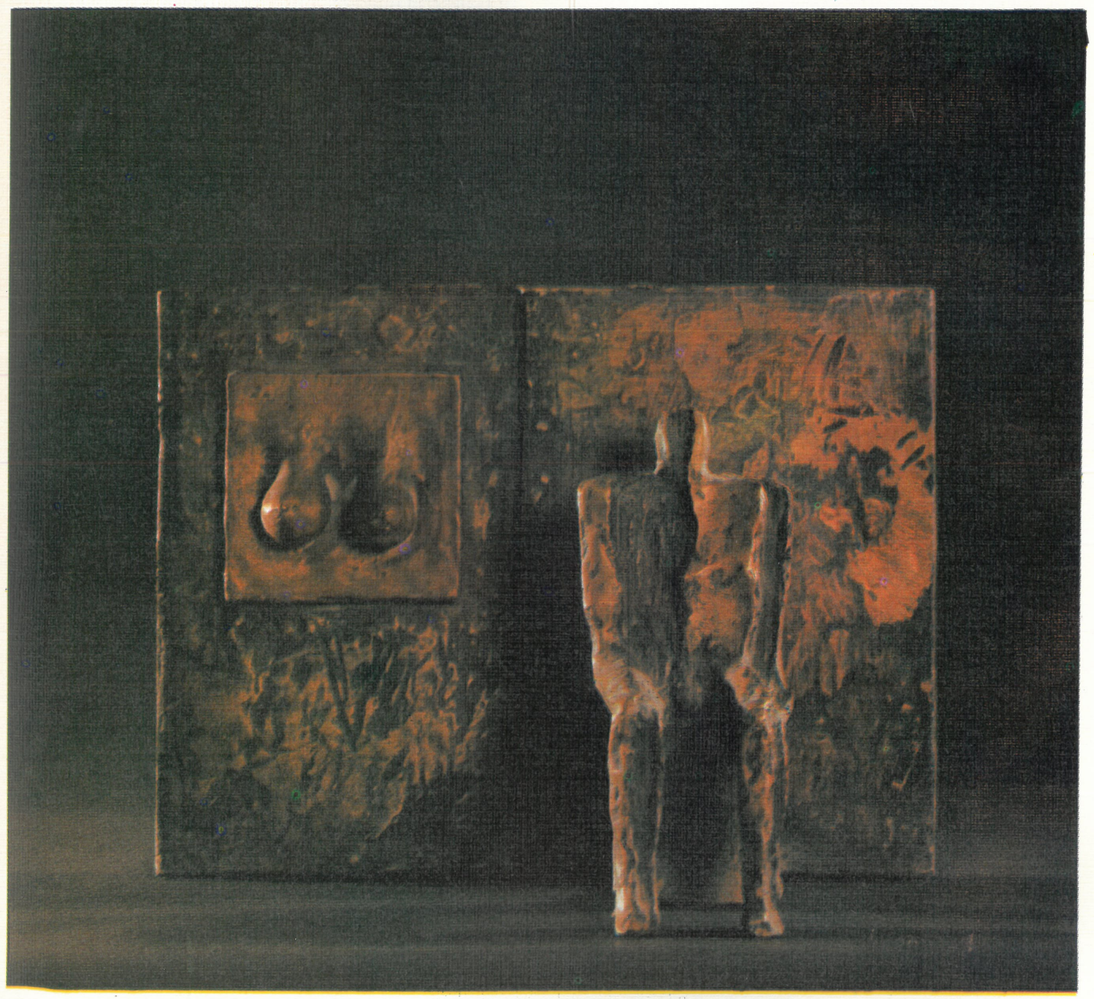
Figure Bronze

If Ismail Fattah has been able to reach such a stage in establishing his own vision and art how come that he followed a completely different style when he was commissioned to do monumental works for public places? Ismail Fattah's explanation comes precise and straight forward: "I simply followed the subject according to the stated conditions. There was a need to decorate the city with monumental works of certain specifications. In fact there were very few artists here who could accomplish such works." Undoubtedly such monumental works carried the artist away for some time, from his elaborated visual concepts but enlarged his experience. Ismail Fattah, nevertheless, was able to introduce academic works of artistic value such as Abu Nuwas and Al-Wasiti which is very similar to it. These statues do not only show the competence of the artist and his mastery over his media but it also reveal his own creativity on a given form. Ismail Fattah followed quite a different line in portraying Abu Nuwas the great notorious Arab poet whose permissiveness and outrageous attitudes, as reflected in his poetry, were quite controversial along history. But the great poet was rather seen differently. A graceful, serene and elegant man who seems to pose completely relaxed and contemplative surrounded by his elegantly spread cloak in a mood of ecstacy and elusiveness.

Ismail Fattah, fascinated by the poetry and personality of the man, saw the poet as he was. He saw the transcendental, and not the factual earthly reality.

Thus, the artist was able to capture the poet in a momentum of spiritual vitality, in a flight of mind that put him in trance. Beyond all the boundaries, the artist was able to penetrate the reality and capture a rare moment regardless of time and place. He was able to conceive the pious and the libertine in one glimpse. In moving beyond, Ismail was able to introduce, through portraying the poet, a subtle beauty impregnated with the power of expression.

Work of art as an adventure that largely depends on accident, is an intuitive apprehension, a sensation derived from nature and physical experience and also a



Composition, Bronze

voyage of exploration that persistently moves until it approaches its destination. But according to Herbert Read (The Philosophy of Art - Faber) the artist "long before he gets near to that destination, he has, as it were, been carried away by a momentum of his own creating. The forms he has gradually realized and perfected have taken on a life of their own and pursue a logical development which the artist could not charge if he would - short of giving up the adventure."

It was with such an adventurous spirit that Ismail Fattah was able to reach "a momentum of his own creating" while approaching architectural designs of the Martyr's Dome, a work "just perfect and unspeakable of" as Kenneth Armitage described it during his visit to Baghdad in October 1986. Highly charged with spiritual enthusiasm, Ismail Fattah conceived an abstract theme. The result was a simple eloquent, precise and brief expression of nobility, and sacrifice and eternity.

The idea of the form was mainly derived from the domes of the Iraqi mosques, but slightly variated, split in two halves instead of being one solid mass. In doing so, the artist made use of space and its interrelation with the volume. The great height which one may feel while standing in the middle of the monument surrounded by the two curved halves of the dome create a unique sensation designed from the grandeur of the monument as well as the clarity of blue ceramics covering the surface of the dome, a clarity analogues to the purity of the sky which appear from within while at the same time it contains the monument. The wide empty space which surrounds the monument is undoubtedly the most essential relation which does not only endow the monument with special surrounding but it also connect the theme with nature (the prominent role played by the architects here must be taken into serious consideration).

Again Ismail Fattah succeeded in penetrating the boundaries of reality and perceiving with a "momentum of his own creating" the untouchable truth, and again he was able to combine the celestial with the earthly.

The Martyr's Dome may well stand to define the unspecific definition of creativity. One can go on giving scientific explanations of the work. It is like a piece of music the beauty of which can only be identified through experiencing spiritually and physically its powerful impact.

In an age of science, where all logicalities seem to take an antagonistic view towards metaphysical values, art persistently proceeds carrying, like the world itself, its poetic mysteries in order to establish its true and influential values far beyond place and time. What is creativity if it is not this penetration of reality, this remarkable power to transport us out of our ordinary selves and everyday lives. Perhaps it is this very power that led Nietzche to believe that "art generally make life possible and worth living."

Portrait, Bronze

Nasiri and Fattah Debate

Rafa Nasiri held this conversation with Ismail Fattah in an effort to determine the development of Ismail Fattah's artistic career. But far from being a formal question and answer, or interviewer and subject, it developed into a conversation between two artists with both their opinions, agreements and disagreements. The development of the modern Iraqi art from the 1960s till today is particularly interesting, as both artists established their careers during this period. Rafa Nasiri took Ismail Fattah's first exhibition in 1958 as a starting point:

Rafa Nasiri and Ismail Fattah

Nasiri: I would like to go way back, to that first exhibition you took part (The Olympic Club) , it was in 1958 I believe.

Ismail Fattah: The Exhibition of the Revolution, the first exhibition after the Revolution. (14 July 1958).

R.N.: I found it strange to see the influence of Faik Hassan in your work and not Jewad Selim, although that was the peak of Jewad's career.

I.F.: All the painters myself included were influenced by Faik Hassan and not Jewad Selim. Jewad had his own line based on the ideas and concepts of the Baghdad Modern Art Group, so he did not really influence painters that much.

R.N.: Did you continue the same style after you went to Italy? I know that you had studied painting with Faik Hassan and sculpture with Jewad Selim.

I.F.: I suffered a great shock when I first went to Italy ... call it a cultural shock!! I could not do anything during the initial year. I came to realize that we were really isolated in Iraq. Our world was Faik Hassan and little else. I had to adjust to grasp this much bigger world. I realized that our concepts were rather shaky and not really based on anything solid. It was only in Italy that I was able to re-orientate my concepts and way of thinking. Thus I began to understand Jewad Selim after Italy.

R.N.: I believe that even today we are still in isolation from the rest of the world. Although the artistic awareness has advanced considerably, the student who graduates today from the Institute or Academy (of Fine Arts) will also face the impact of a much larger

world, full of experiencs and experiments, when he goes abroad.

I.F.: But the young are benefitting from us more than we did from the pioneers.

R.N.: This could be true to a certain extent. But it is the whole art movement in general which has expanded and has more opportunities than before...

I remember your exhibition of 1965, which you held after your return from Italy. It was a shocking experience ... All the works were in white, with little black or actually with little colour ... Of course, I had just come back from China, so I was not really with the modern . You know that my modern concept developed after my trip to Portugal.

I.F.: That trip was very important in your career... (Going back to that exhibition), the outcome was really negative ... people even spat on the paintings.

R.N.: What about other artists?

I.F.: Very few appreciated it.

R.N.: Where does this exhibition fit in your career?

I.F.: In the beginning I was painting under the influence of Faik Hassan, even after that first year in Italy. Then I was influenced by the expressionists such as Node, Beckmann and Kakoshka. Meeting my wife at that time had a great effect in the development of my artistic career. I later became influenced by the Italian Neo-Realism, Gotuzzo, etc., while special tendencies and traits began. White as a colour began to fascinate me, while all the other colours diminished and faded. I mixed white with black and little else.

R.N.: Probably the sculpture effect ... the figures began taking a sculpted look. Ismail, your compositions were figurative and not abstract, why did you shock the public?!!

I.F.: Well, some of the works were abstract.

R.N.: That exhibition could be considered important in the sense that it opened up new ideas and styles.

I.F.: The years between 1960-1965 were dead years. After my return from Italy in 1964, I got to know a great number of young, open-minded and creative artists with a tremendous desire to know more.

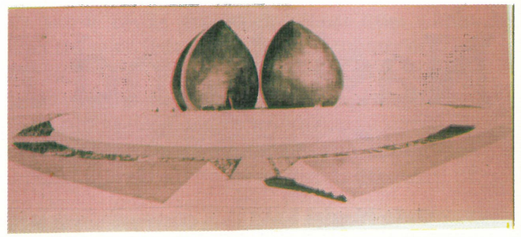
R.F.: We must not forget the influence of both Laszisky and Artomovisky which had begun by that time. True rennovators by themselves. What other important event do you recall?

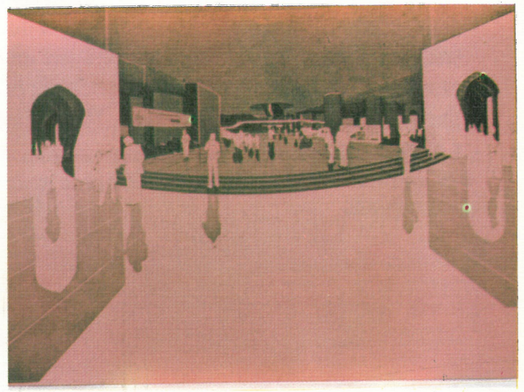
I.F.: Kadhim Haider's exhibition 'The Martyr'. This was one of the most important exhibitions which had had a great impact, although I did not appreciate it fully ... it had too much illustration.

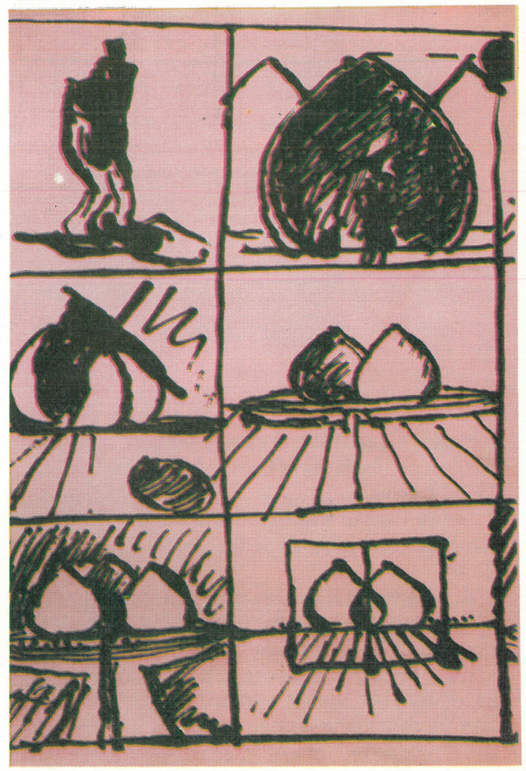
R.N.: Till when did that stage continue?

I.F.: Till the June 1967 War. Sculpture began to take a great deal of my time and efforts, although I continued drawing, and making small figures. I held several exhibitions at the Baghdadi Society and Wasiti Gallery. I held a painting and sculpture exhibition.

R.N.: Let's stop here at this point. In the 196os, you were painter/sculpture. Why did you stop painting?







Studies for Martyr Monument

I.F.: I love and enjoy painting and drawing till now. But sculpture took a great deal of my time.

R.N.: How much did the works of the public squares affect your work?

I.F.: To a great deal. Although I have never considered them creative works, as such, as any craftsman can do them, but the country was in need of such monuments.

R.N.: Wasn't there any craftsmen who could do such works? I think there are specialized craftsmen for such works.

I.F.: We lack such craftsmen, even now. Cannonica, for example, who did King Faisal, Attaturk, and other monuments, is a great craftsman, but he is not even considered among the Italian art movement.

R.N.: When did you work on Al-Risafi, your first monumment at Risafi Square?

I.F.: During 1968-1970.

R.N.: What about the Re-Insurance Building? (Presently, the Ministry of Trade, Khullani Square).

I.F.: During 1969-1970

R.N.: This work is considered among your top works. How do you relate it with the Risafi, Al Kadhimi, and others?

I.F.: I had to do Risafi and the others partly for a financial need, and also because I wanted the recognition of the people who accused me of not being able to do such type of work.

R.N.: Isn't this a justification?!! Many also accuse me of not being able to draw!!

I.F.: It's not really a justification ... They were needed.

R.N.: How do you rate your Re-Insurance work?

I.F.: As my top work and so is Gilgamesh at Dar Al-Salam Palace. (It was removed later - The Editor)

R.N.: What about the Medical City? When was it done?

I.F.: Also during the period 1968-1970

R.N.: All these works were done at that same period. Who do you think was behind all this?

I.F.: Husham Munir (the architect). He also gave great freedom. At that time I also did the Ministry of Industry building (at Khullani Square).

R.N.: This brings us to a new subject: the relation between art and architecture. There was this big movement in those years 1968-1970. This was Husham. But why did it stop at a certain stage?

I.F.: Husham himself continued. The same efforts were recently made in Haifa Street, but the works are not as successful.

R.N.: The architect needs to have a clear idea. The works of the Conference Palace are successful in general because the architect had a clear idea. Your works are figurative, why did you do an abstract work for the Conference Palace? This was considered a point against you by many.

I.F.: I had made abstract works before while in Italy, not similar to this of course. Figures would not

Conference Palace Sculpture (Maquette)

have worked in this building. I utilized art to fit in this modern building of white marble. The whiteness gave me the impression of an oasis and so I used an abstract palm tree as a symbol; I also made it in two pieces signifying both the Tigris and the Euphrates.

R.N.: Do you relate this work with the Martyr's Monument?

I.F.: The Conference Palace came after the Martyr's Monument which was in 1978. But the basic idea is the same: the movement of the two forms or pieces together.

R.N.: Ismail, if you want to rate your works, the Martyr's Monument comes at the top, then the Conference Palace. What comes third?

I.F. Haifa Street.

R.N.: Does it also have the same concept?

I.F.: Not at all. In Haifa Street it is stylized figurative.

That came after my trip to England, and working at the same factory where Henry Moore's works were cast. I made a small statue with the influence of Moore. In fact, my work shows the influence of Moore and the Sumerian art. I started this tendency for the Sumerians while in Italy, where my work later developed to have the two tendencies, Sumerian and modern European ... The Haifa Street monument has a Sumerian grandeur similar to the greatness of Abu Sunbul. I also painted it and felt very pleased. This colouring, call it a trick of mine, but I feel good about it.

R.N.: Did you colour your statues in Italy?

I.F.: Yes, from the first time I went to Italy.

R.N.: This is probably because you are a painter sculptor. During what period did you work on your small figures?

I.F.: The 1970s.

R.N.: You used to form squares, letters, symbols, etc.

I.F.: Yes, but I had the square from the beginning, since Italy.

R.N.: But it became more pronounced in the 1970s, in London and Baghdad group exhibitions of 1976-1978. I also relate the use of the square to your Re-Insurance work.

I.F.: Yes, I also have a mural at the Iraqi Lawyers' Society. That door has a mixture of a square and an inscription tablet... a beautiful and simple Sumerian effect.

R.N.: Can we say that you have two main lines in your art?

I.F.: Perhaps.

R.N.: One is the figurative work with symbols, etc..., the other is the abstract, Martyr's Monument and the like.

I.F.: But the movement between one form and another is there even in the figurative work.

R.N.: Yes, but basically there are the two: the figurative and the non figurative styles.

I.F.: I was also an abstract artist. I like to play with two or three forms. The Re-Insurance work has an interplay between the forms, therefore I make use of the display. The figure protrudes then reverts back and up front again. It plays on the viewer ... This started with my fascination for the cinema (the American movies) where the camera pictures huge buildings then zooms close while the picture assumes different shapes and forms.

Family, Bronze

R.N.: Did this fascination continue throughout your career?

I.F.: Yes, in all my works.

R.N.: Do you cast your works in bronze by yourself?

I.F.: Yes.

R.N.: We now come to the Martyr's Monument. This is really a feat. It stands as an outstanding monument not only in Iraq and the Arab countries, but in the whole world. When Armitage saw it (during the Baghdad International Art Festival, October 1986) he said he had not seen anything like it.

I.F.: He even hugged me when he saw me later that day.

R.N.: He was looking for you. You know how the Europeans look for perfection and Armitage found that perfection, between the space and height, the unification to a perfect whole. Notwithstanding the fact that he had seen other international works, besides he had seen the Unknown Soldier just half an hour before. The one aspect we lack in general is presentation. We have our concepts and ideas, sensitivity and all the other artistic requirements, but we do not present well. The Martyr's Monument presents itself as perfect without flaws.

I.F.: When I discussed this Monument with Armitage, he said three things make it great: 1. The design, Great strength in the design. 2. The execution, 3. The one who approved to have it made - the great courage!

R.N.: It is very daring to have such a huge abstract work of this standard especially in Iraq and the other Arab countries.

I.F.: Do you remember when I used to talk to you about my idea?

R.N.: Yes. I even remember when you demonstrated your idea by cutting an orange! What were your sources?

I.F.: In 1972 I had a sun-ring, with the martyr coming out from the centre. Then I reconsidered. We were given total freedom in creativity and without any financial limits to the cost. The dome came last. I had a fascination for the dome which represents greatness.

R.N.: The dome has Iraqi or rather Baghdadi features.

I.F.: Yes, the dome is Iraqi. I kept on researching the dome. I read a special research on domes. It shows that the dome is originally Iraqi. Even the Andalusian Arch is roiginally in the Sumerian seals. I did not want to do figure work for the Martyr's Monument. Thus the idea of the dome took shape. I saw that Baghdad and its great space could have a big dome. The Pantheon has the biggest dome in the world, 32 metres high. This is just what I wanted.

R.N.: Did you know of the exact location?

I.F. Not at that time, But I insisted on having an open space. Actually, it was supposed to have been at another location. Big monuments are originally from the East ... the Pyramids, the Obelisk, the Spiral Minarets, etc... The earth is flat, so these monuments can be seen from all directions. It was only 300 years ago that the Europeans began imitating this and they took the Obelisk. Even the Eiffel Tower cannot be seen in complete unless from close up... The Martyr's Monument has a dome of 40 metres high. During the discussions, the point of putting it on a height was raised. I rejected this completely. The Europeans put their church or temple on height to make it visible.

R.N.: Putting that Monument on a height or elevation would have made it closer to a mosque. But it is actually a sculpture — a work of art.

I.F.: Yes, a very modern work. In the beginning I had several attempts such as an idea of having the martyr bursting from the centre. But I did not like it — it was too theatrical. Then, the idea of life versus death began to form. The two pieces moving together towards martyrdom and fertility and the life stream. I

Reflection, Bronze

Sitting Man, Bronze

moved the pieces till I got the interplay I wanted ... It made me very happy, and I was really very pleased.

R.N.: Can you relate this with the interplay of your statues before?

I.F. Yes, that helped. The idea is the same basically.

R.N.: Did you depend on the dome and arch?

I.F.: No, only on the dome. The arch comes out from the dome. It is really very simple and I wanted it that way. That is why I refused to have any writing or inscription on the walls. The dome has the same colour inside and out. The light plays with the shades.

R.N.: How long did it take to complete?

I.F.: Two years and a half.

R.N.: What other works did you do during this period?

I.F.: The abstract monument of the Conference Palace, and other small statues.

R.N.: Is it possible to say that the Martyr's Monument is a turning point in your career? I believe that anyone studying your career has to divide to two stages the pre-Martyr's Monument stage and the post-Martyr's Monument stage. What is your opinion on this?

I.F.: I suppose so. Everything has become more advanced after the Martyr's Monument and the Conference Palace.

R.N.: Do you think you will reach full abstraction? Or, better, let us go through the main stops in your career. What comes after the Institute of Fine Arts and Italy?

I.F.: My professor in Italy was of great help, just as Jewad Selim was in Baghdad. But Rome, and its exhibitions, Venice Biennales, etc... helped tremendously. It was here that I started a tendency for English sculpture and Armitage in particular. I told him when we met that I was influenced by him when young. English sculpture is mainly figurative of the Moore school. But Moore has the movement or vitality within the form, just like the ancient Eastern arts, the Sumerian and Egyptian.

R.N: Moore said he was influenced by the Sumerian art. Did you hold any exhibitions while you were in Italy?

I.F.: I held an exhibition of painting and sculpture. It was in 1963 that my sculptor identity began to form.

R.N.: I remember your confidence!

I.F.: I won the Margotta Prize in Italy, and the Varecca in 1965.

R.N.: Yet, you did not try to enter the world internationally. You participated in group exhibitions but never entered the world.

I.F.: The public monuments took most of my time. Now I am more secure and I know what I want. I know what influences enrich the development of my art.

R.N.: Don't you think that communication with the rest of the world is important? There are many who believe that one should be satisfied locally?

I.F. That is sheer ignorance and completely unacceptable.

R.N.: After all, we are a part of the world. But no matter how much we keep in line with the rest of the world, we remain Iraqis rooted to this land.

I.F.: Particularly Iraqi art. It is distinguished from Arab and international art by its distinct characteristics. The top artists, perhaps twenty, have their own spirit or Iraqi characteristics. This is particularly the case with the artists of the 1960s.

R.N.: You did your Re-Insurance work after the June 1967 War. Do you believe the period after the June 1967 War is a decisive period in Iraqi art?

I.F.: Definitely a very important period which caused great change. The generation of artists and poets of the early 1960s had a creative ability but no clear vision. It was the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war which effected the general mood and tendencies.

R.N.: The mid 1960s was a period of great change in the world. The change was total not only in the technique but in the concept and way of thinking. Real art began from 1965.

I.F.: In Iraq, the 1950s were experimental years. You would see that in one exhibition of Jewad Selim or Faik Hassan, there were various styles or trends. Artists of the 1960s started from one vision or idea which they tried to develop and enrich.

R.N.: Yes. The character of the artist changed. He became more responsible — He was no more than a painter for the painting's sake. He had to be responsible for his ideas. He held lectures and discussions, while other forms of art, such as posters, etc., appeared.

I.F.: The 1960s artist is not a continuation of the 1950s artists. There was a complete break. The 1960s artist rebelled against the 1950s.

R.N.: It was the vision which changed. But I also think that the break came naturally. It was not total. The 1960s artists went abroad to study, and when they came back they had lost touch with the developments of the late 1950s and early 1960s. We (our generation) got used to them (1950s)...

I.F.: The intellect became important in the 1960s, not like before when only the painting was important. Jewad Selim, for example, went on searching.

R.N.: But Selim is an exception.

I.F.: Shakir Hassan Al Sa'eed is also of the 1950s generation, but he only developed in 1966. His serious contribution to the art movement came in the early 1970s.

R.N.: He was absent for the period before. (He was in France). Ismail, going back to your career's main landmarks. Was your trip to Toronto a fourth stop?

I.F.: It was in Canada that I saw a lot of big works in open space. There are many daring and original works in England and in Canada. I recall a sculpture I saw in Canada, made of 3 big cubes sliding from one another. I also saw a lot of films on this kind of art in open space. I realized that I'm not different from them. If they could do this, so can I! It inspired me with courage.

R.N.: Although the concept of modernism, as such, is not so clear in Iraq, you represent, or you are in fact, one of the symbols of modernism. How do you relate with this?

I.F.: I am not alone. I can say that we as a group of a few artists, painters and sculptors have created a base for modern art in Iraq.

R.N: But it remains a small movement. I also fear that there will be a setback. How 'modern' is Iraqi sculpture?

I.F.: It is still not modern. Even the most modern is not in fact really modern.

R.N.: This is just the opposite case with painting.

I.F.: But sculpture is more difficult. There has also been no leadership since Jewad Selim.

R.N.: Do you think a leadership is needed?

I.F.: Definitely so. Jewad created a whole movement by himself.

R.N.: But he did not intend to. Notwithstanding his achievements we cannot go on saying Jewad and only Jewad. He opened up horizons and new visions. Even in painting, who can lead painting today? Leadership, as I see it, comes from the accumulation of experiments and experiences presented.

I.F.: I agree with you; this is precisely how we are influenced by great artists.

R.N.: As a teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts, have you influenced any of your students?

I.F.: I have always tried to open up the students' minds. I used to teach ceramics before but I have began teaching sculpture since the past three years. I got to know very talented and enthusiastic students who are ready to give once they have been directed. As a teacher one develops closer links with students, and I can truly say that I have helped in the making of a small movement ... and it has started.

R.N.: I saw in South Korea the works of the students of the Academy taking place in public gardens, creating environmental art.

I.F.: Sculpture is particularly more fitting for environmental art than painting. I also saw such works in Canada, such as a work of pebbles in the middle of a sea .. most effective.

R.N.: Most of these works are good for photographic effects. In Baghdad, where do you think we have a most likely place? Don't you think Haifa Street would be the best place?

I.F.: Definitely yes. Just like the works of my students at the court of Saddam Art Centre. I gave them bones as a starting point and when they finished the works, I told them to colour them. The result, as you can see, is beautiful, optimistic, happy.

R.N.: Why are there no such works around?

I.F.: I think they lack courage.

R.N.: What was the role of the architect at Haifa Street?

I.F.: The architect tried in Haifa Street, but the final decision was taken by Baghdad Municipality. There should have been an elaborated planning system to include this type of art.

R.N.: In Jeddah for example there are beautiful works around in the city. The squares of New Delhi are full of modern works. Sankho Chaudri, the well known sculptor himself is a member of the Mayorate. What is your estimation of young sculptors?

I.F.: Although a small movement has begun during these past years sculpture remains behind. But it is not only here. I was in Cairo recently , I saw a collective Arab exhibition, and most of the works were nothing. Sami Mohammed (Kuwait) is promising.

R.N.: Where are most of your works, in collections?

I.F.: Mostly in Italy, Baghdad and a large part in Beirut.

R.N.: Ismail, will you go back to painting?

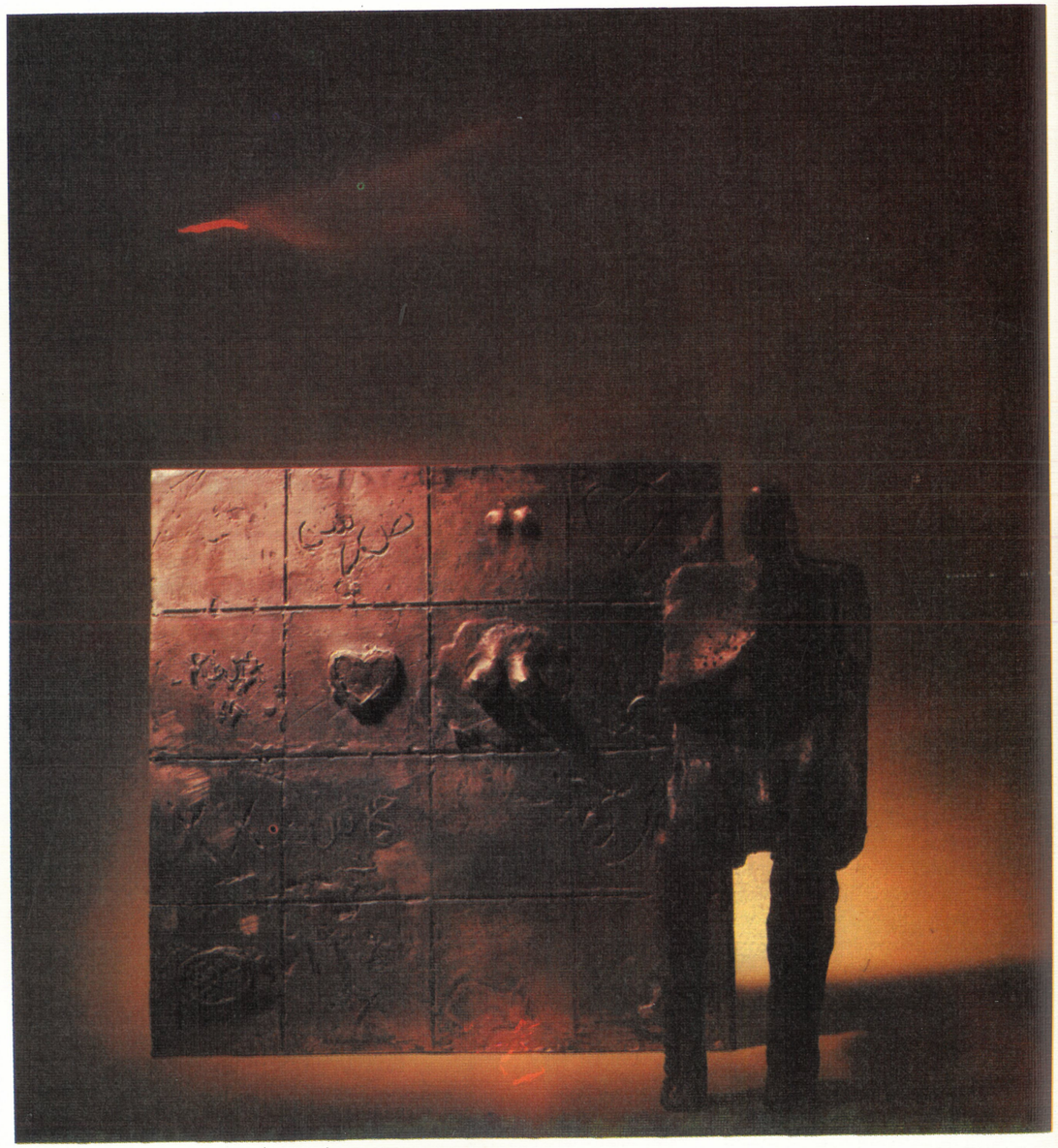
I wish I could. It is a great wish of mine. I do a lot of drawings and compare certain forms together. Then I take photographs of these forms, it becomes much influential - I really enjoy their influence on me.

Translated by Lubna Alaman

Ismail Fattah was born in 1934. In 1958 he was awarded the diploma of Painting and Sculpture by the Fine Arts Institute, Baghdad, and then went on to study art in Rome. Held seven one-man exhibitions in Rome, Beirut and Baghdad. Participated in various national and international exhibitions.

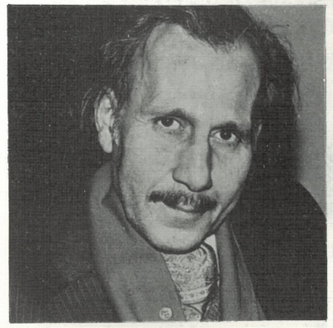
His works were exhibited in various international exhibitions including the Venice Bienniale (1976) and the India Triennaiale (1976). Many public buildings and squares in Baghdad are adorned with examples of his sculpture and murals. Won the First Prize for sculpture (1963) for the competition for foreign artists.

He is now a teacher of ceramics at the Academy of Fine Arts, Baghdad.



Composition, Bronze

Rushdi al-Amil



*Rushdi Al-Amil was born in Ana, Anbar Province in 1939 and studied at the Faculty of Art, Baghdad University. However, after three years of study, he left the Faculty and started his career as a journalist. His poetical works include: **"Ishtar's Whispers"** 1951, **"Songs Without Tears,"** 1956, **"Baghdad's Eye and Rain,"** 1960, **"Words Have Doors and Sails,"** 1971, **"You First,"** 1977, **"Migration of Colours,"** 1985 and **"Ali's Garden,"** 1986.*

Al-Amil's poetry has developed irrespective of external influences. In other words, he has managed to develop his own poetry apart from cultural suppression that stamped many poetical attempts of his contemporaries. Therefore, al-Amil seems to have emerged as a poet with a certain identity far from the illusion of innovation and modernity. However, his poetry is pregnant with the terminology of modernity.

Two Poems

Don't touch me tonight,
My children wait at the door alone,
At the door, and you are the other man.
Don't touch me tonight, please.
My children are behind the door, and you are the other man.
Please, tonight don't touch a breast which gave suck to my children and the taste of sleep. Don't come near an arm which in the midst of night chased away their fears, please tonight,
Don't come near the lips which kissed at dawn the eyes of sleeping babes.

My shadow kneeling over the cradle embracing the colour of the dream,
And the face of the doll hugged by the children of the other man.
Please, I always crossed the bridge to come to your lap.
The other man was on the bank of sleeping love,
Hood-winked by blind love,
Intoxicated by dark eyes, getting up at dawn to kiss the eyelashes of the woman
Drowsy before his eyes, spreading on his shoulders her hair,
He then falls asleep. I roam away from him, forgetting the colour of fire
The taste of fire, forgetting his cold lips by the fire,
Fed by morning kisses. And I forget.
Please, tonight, take my hand into the glow
To warm it by the shadow of the forgotten man, the lips of the child on the restless chest,
Wavering between the mother's milk and the lover's hand, creeping on the chest.
Take all tonight, except the mother's sorrow upon oblivion banks.
He rang the door bell. The night watchman answered and said:
"She left this moment"
The coming man asked him: "Whereto?" The watchman then replied:
"O can a watchman of back door towns
Know where a woman goes at midnight?"

Daily Scene

Shall I say you have come back now, your black coat wet with drizzle,
And scents?
Well ...
You went as far as the space between the door
And the myrtle bushes.
You mumbled to the cat,
Turned on the light,
Turned on the other stove
In our room.
You opened the window,
And returned to the living room, waiting.

****

A lock of hair drops down.
You lift it by both hands.
Your eyes wander to the street:
"Will he come now?
His fingers clench with cold;
His bag is full of morning bread;
His forehead shows the hunger of children, the yearning of the deprived.

And in his eyes, the eyes of the poor;
And on his lips the salt.
His shoulders wrapped with martyrs robes."
You touch the watch:
It is midnight.
You go to the door,
You return to the living room,
Then you lay on the tired table a forearm,
And gloomy you become.

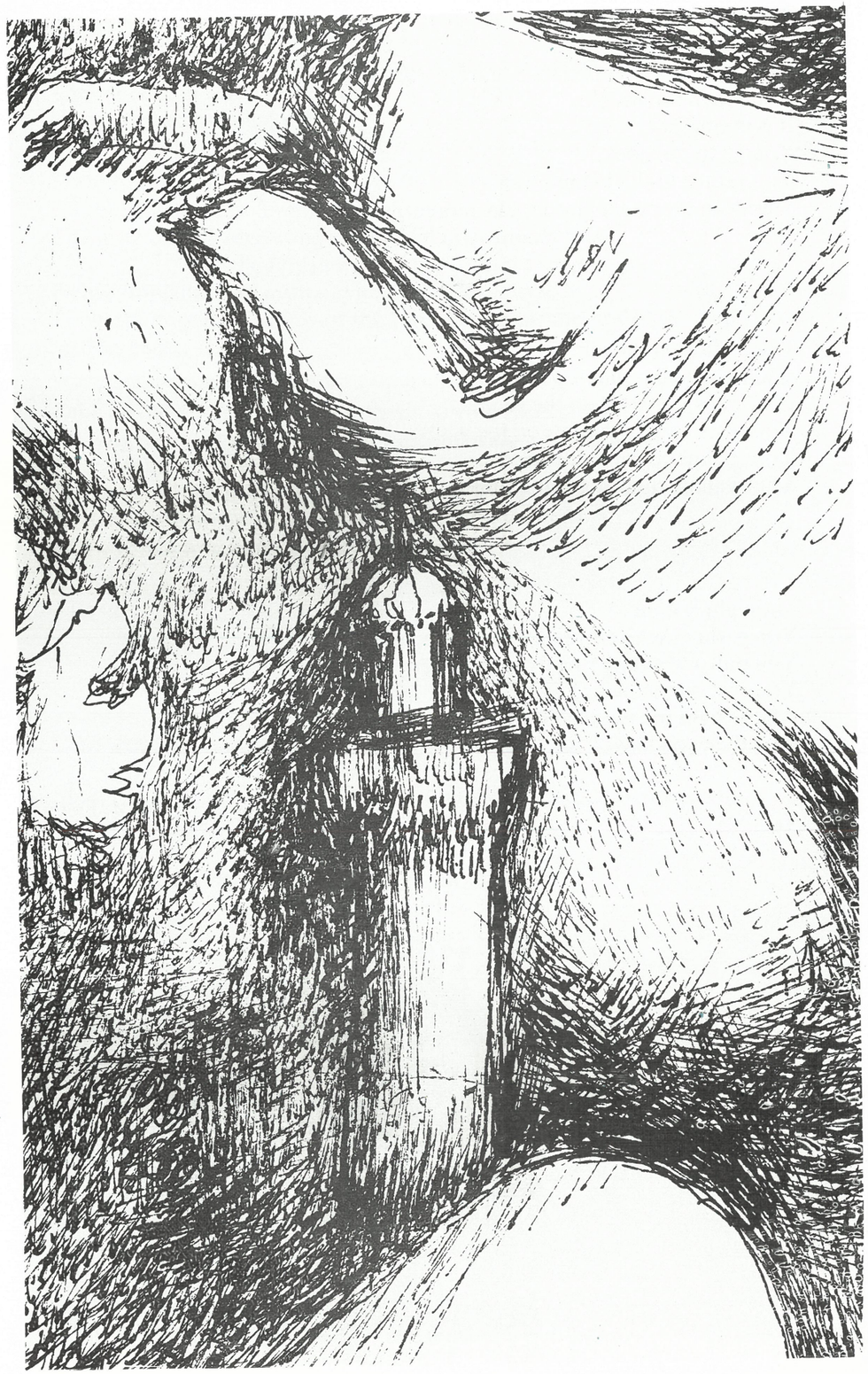
****

The night is at the midst.
The blind bell remains palsied.
And steps move far on the road.
Your face casts a shadow on the walls;
Your palms crumble the leaves;
Your yellow ring cuts in the finger
A round circle.

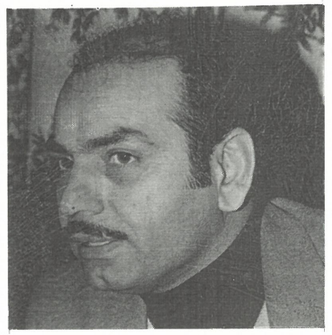
****

Midnight is gone.
You gather the tired years in a sorrow basket;
You pull a wedding ring from the finger;
You cast on the living room
All the light the eyes have left;
And then you leave.

Translated by Dr. A.W. Lu'Lu'a



Ali Ja'far al- 'Allaq



Ali Ja'far al-Allaq was born in 1945 in Wasit Province, and graduated with B.A. in Arabic literature, Al Mustansiriya University, 1973. In 1983, he obtained his Ph.D from Exeter University, U.K., and his thesis was entitled "The Artistic Problems in al-Bayati's Poetry - A Comperative Critical Study."

His published works include: **Nothing Happens, Nobody Comes,** poems, 1973, **The Family Trees,** poems , 1979, **The Gypsies Kingdom** critical essays, 1981, and **Fruit of the Past** poems, 1987.

The poems of Al-Allaq are pregnant with various possibilities and are full of meaning. They are suggestive but ultimately prove their poetic certainty.

Smoke of Trees

From the opening of the window,
He sees
Some clouds that run;
He sees
A girl
Provoking the wind,
An old man
Bending before the wind,

And lovers
Gathering dews and snow flakes,
From the embers of their palms.
He sees …
And sees
A longing
Washing the trees.

****

Is this a woman
Speeding to her pleasure?
A newly born
Year
Clad with clouds?
Rain
Sprinkling the roof,
Hovering above my memory;
Under the drizzle of Ireland
We walked;
Water
Was hidden
In the branches,
And clouds top the hills,
And a woman
Led me
To roads
That lead
To roads;
She showed me
The rose of memory …
And we took shelter
Under her coat
Where summer outpouring intensifies:
We sang,
We were burnt by the dews;
The forests
Turned about with us,
We suffered the adhesion of naked trees,
We splintered.

****

On
The grass of Ireland,
The

M
O
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N

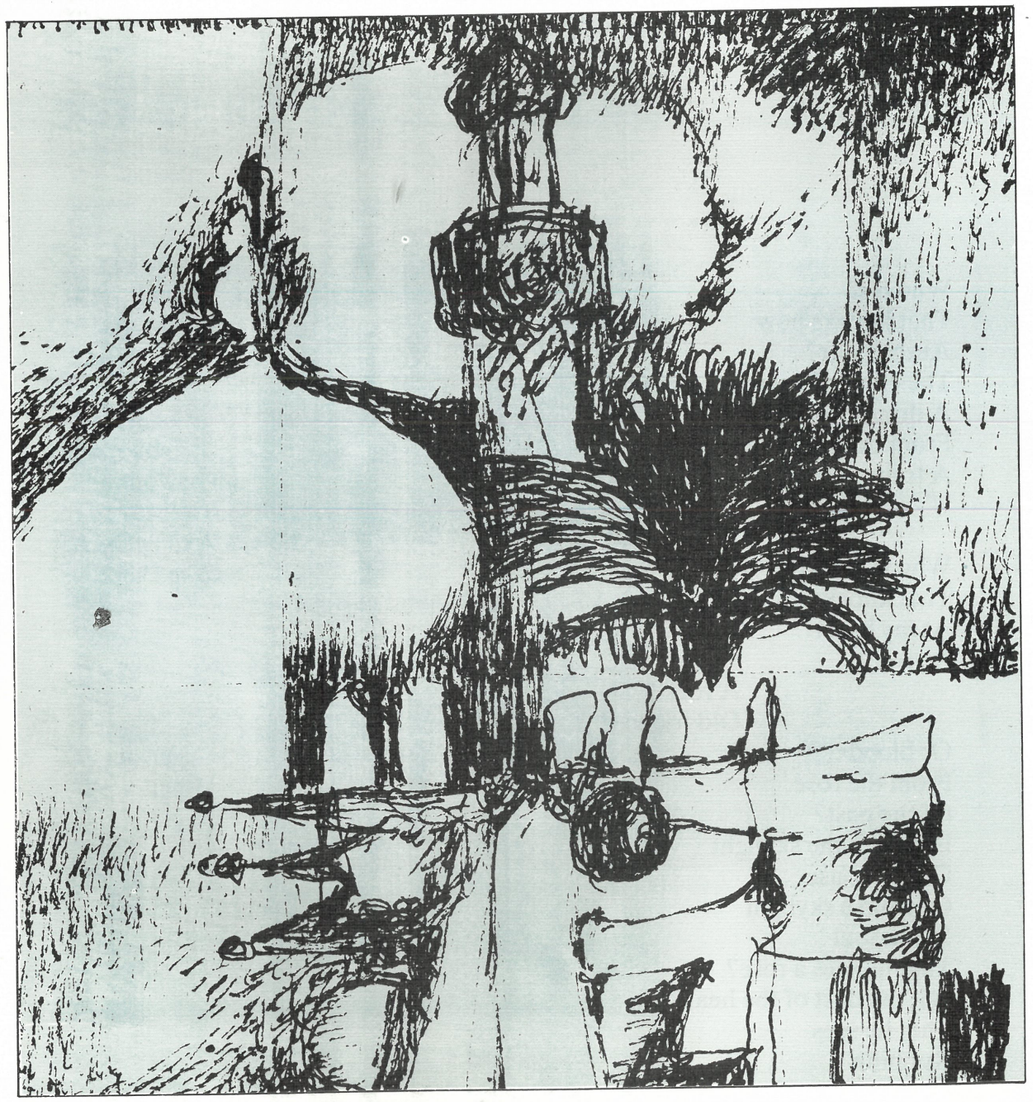
Of the past
Splintered …
And the rose
Broke its wound.
Is this an opening
That leads to my soul?
Dry clouds approach,
And roses of blood,
Old friends,
Roads that lead
Nowhere
Or lead to the
Unknown …
Are these the clouds of a woman
That are in the soul,
Or is it
The fragrance
Of her wet coat?

****

Who is it
That knocks now
At the door?
The clouds of another woman?
A drizzle
From the blood of memory?
A train
Wailing
In the soul?
Who is it
That knocks now
At my heart?
A river?
A rock?
Old friends?
Or blood
From the rose
Of the past?
Is it from the skylight
Of the house,
Or from a skylight
In the soul
That he sees a rose?
Is it the dust of the heart
That he sees
Running

Or is it a lifetime
Running away?
Is it

Smoke
That he sees,
Or is it
Trees?



Fruit of the Past

Her chimes are a song
of silver words,
a fruit from the trees
of memory,

an echo,
a canopy

of greenness and clouds
stretching from the hotel facade
to the horizon.

Her chimes are a throng
of pigeons,
making merry in my poem,
flitting between the echo
and the flower of words.

Stealing out of her tent,
she hurries towards the cold sea
where the grass is in bed,
and the wind is a glow in the dark,
and the boughs are bending
in the greenness of the dream.

A tass of wine is each balcony,
a lady in the prime of her youth;
and the narrow roads
are a poem,
an old echo,
a lust,
vintage stone.

Children have gathered together;
they are building a castle
of ash,
around which they sing:
O, mountain of ash and stone,
Granada, the girl from the paupers' quarter,
the wine of the gypsies,
leaves her bed every night
for the wind and the rain.

I see her
at the dawn of every day,
stealing away from her slumber
at the hour when sleep is sweetest,
at the hour when light and darkness become twins,
and dew becomes a bed,
sitting
at the edge of night
on its last rug.

I see her,
I call out:
Granada,
fruit of the past,
one breeze enfolds us
one is our dust and of the same time,
identical are our cards
We are the remains of the same blessed rain,
We are splinters of our grand dream.

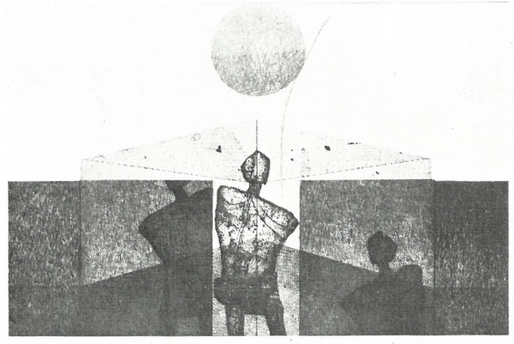
The stone gets wet,
an old echo,
flows over me,
the fuit of the past glows
among the arms of trees,
calling sparrows
to her cloudy bed,
calling me to stay up the night with her;
Granada is my guest,
and this is my poem,
and night is in its last part,
and rain is our curtain,
stretching over the trees.

We sit together between dream and bed,
watching the roses of dawn
washing with sleep
and the last dew
our leaves,
collecting us:
a splinter after a splinter,
blending us with the clouds,
and greenness,
and with the poem.

The fruit of the past is in our cloudy bed,
a breeze overflows the pebbles,
and wakes the new buds.

Translated by
Dr. Salman D. Al-Wasiti

Salam Kadhim



*Salam Kadhim was born in Wasit Province in 1955 and graduated at the Faculty of Art, Baghdad University. His published works include one collection of poems "**Houses, Smoke**" and a collection of critical essays on war poetry of the youth entitled **"The Warrior's Songs."** Kadhim's poems are expressive, full of dramatic tension and mostly of lyrical quality. He always seeks panoramic aspects in which marginal subjects are interrelated with the main theme of the poem*

Nobody

Not a severe cry descends from the crowd's train
Nor is a dead man in memory.
There is a traitor's face
Covering walls and masks.
There is sleep eaten voraciously by flowers.
No master in the realm of my heart died
bending like a femal on the sea menstruation,
and the flame which goes down like music.

Over there women swept from their threshold the bones
of those who lived before.

There is no sun there.
There is death from the refuse of industrial areas.
There I am fatigued, not left to myself.
Who was who?
In the crowd there are waiting rooms.
In the crowd there is perhaps nobody.
There is a clapping mouth
In a single road at whose end faces do spout.
There I am fatigued, not left to myself.
Who was who?
The sea gnaws on my knee, so do the cries
Is it a bad time that the strangers' journey lies in a small drawer
Poisonous are Adam's laughters
On the other hand, it was a luxurious trap
Nothing I can relate to myself.
Odd and sick does the prey rise in the light.
Not clear is the rest.
When would my bridge and wolf pass
Why don't we go there
Treason is in speech
The city tongues are in my mouth.

Translated by Mohammed Darweesh

Mahdi Issa al-Saqr

Mahdi Issa al-Saqr was born in Basra in 1927. He worked in translation at the end of World War II and as a clerk in Basra Petroleum Company from 1950. Among his short stories' volumes there are: ***"Good Criminals"*** *1954,* ***"The City Anger"*** *1960,* ***"An Old Woman's Puzzle"*** *1986.*

In his stories, particularly those published in ***"An Old Woman's Puzzle"*** *al-Saqr explores the world of the aged and the disabled, how they view life in general and their life in particular. His stories also reveal those people's constant search for peace, comfort and rest in an ever changing world in which they live and ironically cannot play any part. As al-Saqr selects his characters from such people, he in fact becomes an observer of the new transformations in society. Through his stories, the full pace of life is brought forward along with contemplation and action.*

Match-Box

He leaned back on the chair and scanned the customers. Three of them were foreign sailors occupying a table on his right. At another table, there was a sheikh with a massive Iqal [1], on his head, sipping whisky and wiping his mouth with his hand. One of the night-club's dancers was dancing round him and smiling at him whenever he looked at her. But her skinny body, prominent nose and sunken and gloomy eyes did not seduce the old man who ignored her. On his left there were two men, sitting at a table cluttered with beer bottles and dishes of snacks. Some distance off two other dancers were seated, their eyes fixed on the empty chair next to the two men. And further off, under a tree a man was trying to kiss another dancer who sat by his side but she was keeping off.

The man looked at the stage. He saw a large group of riff-raffs were occupying the first rows. Some of them were exchanging jokes with the members of the band. A violin player was doing a bad imitation of some animals' sounds to make them laugh. Then, the man ran his eyes over those sitting on the other side of the club: a man with a woman dancer, an empty table, three men, two empty tables, a man drinking alone and a dancer hovering around him like a hungry dog, again empty tables and a woman dancer sitting alone. His eyes were fixed on her. She had a round face, her eyes were glittering like two stars and shining like two pieces of diamond. She looked different from the rest in the club. She was the sort of woman one does not expect to see in night clubs, and if they were to appear in such places, they would not stay long.

"Whisky, Sir?"

"Qassim, who is she?"

The waiter looked in the direction where the man pointed.

"Sajida"

"Working here?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Dancing or singing?"

"Dancing and singing."

"Fine, invite her to my table."

The waiter kept silent.

"Hurry."

"But she does not sit with customers."

"Doesn't sit? Listen to me, Qassim, don't be stupid." This 'doesn't sit' story is an old one. Tell her I'm not like others."

The waiter went away and the man kept his eyes on him. Qassim bent forward over the dancer and whispered a word to her. She made a gesture of refusal, but Qassim did not give in. He persisted in tempting her to agree. The man's eyes were fixed on Qassim and the girl trying to interrupt the movements of their heads. His patience grew thin. He saw her driving the waiter away and felt as if her hand slapped his face. He had never been rejected by a night-club girl before. So, Qassim came back disappointedly.

"Never mind," he said.

The waiter tried to say something but he indicated to him to go away. Talking about defeat was of no appeal to him. She refused. Never mind.

"Whisky."

He looked around and found the old man embracing the girl who had been , some moments ago, hovering around him. The wine had tempered her ugly features in his mind. He saw two girls sitting with foreign sailors. The chair by the two men on his left was occupied by another girl. Each of the two men tried to win her over while she was smiling at them skilfully. He saw newcomers occupying some tables on the other side. The rows close to the stage were crowded with the riff-raff who were carried away by enthusiasm and were busy applauding a dancer singing in a hoarse voice, "I want you, I want you."

"Whisky, Sir?" said Qassim, the waiter.

"Qassim, when will Sajida dance?"

The waiter pointed to the singer on the stage.

"When Jawhara's turn is over, Sir."

"Sahira is here, shall I call her?" said Qassim after a moment of hesitation.

"No, listen, I'll sit at the front rows. Bring the whisky there."

The waiter was puzzled. The man stood up with his flabby body heading towards the stage pushing his way through the customers. In the front row, he found a vacant chair. He turned his head left and right with a big smile on his lips, revealing extreme modesty and simplicity. He exchanged kind words with the customers and shook hands with some of them. They were overwhelmed by strange feelings and great joy as they felt that they were higher than they thought. It was no simple matter that a man of noble birth would join in their conversation. However, they felt some embarrassment and stopped applauding. The singer was surprised to see him among them. He turned his head towards them.

"Why have you kept silent. Clap hands, we are brothers."

The word 'brothers' gladdened their hearts. They smiled and laughed wholeheartedly. How nice this word was. Some of them began to repeat the song "For ever, I'll obey you, for ever." We are brothers! They started to applaud once again and the man joined in their applause. After Qassim had brought the whisky, the hands slowed down. The precious fluid marred that joy which had overwhelmed them a while ago. Whisky. It was something strange to them. It had no place at the front rows. The man took note of their silence.

"Qassim, whisky for the guys, whisky for them all."

"Whisky? But, No. thank you."

Their faces showed surprise and anxiety at the same time.

"We are brothers. No reason for shyness."

They recovered their joy.

"I want white arak.[2] white," cried one of them.

"Drink whisky."

"I want white to get drunk quickly."

"Drink whisky until you get drunk. Drink until you get drunk. Qassim, whisky for all."

The woman singer finished her song and left the stage. The man turned to those around him and asked about their jobs and

lives. He grew sad, as he listened to their tales of misery.

Those sitting a few yards away whispered to each other what they knew about him. Qassim and two other waiters brought whisky. Their eyes glittered and the man took note of the members of the band playing a prelude to a song. Then, Sajida appeared with a green dress, long sleeves and clutching a white handerkerchief in her hand. She began to sing. "Glad, I'm glad." The man laughed boisterously.

"You're glad? Your face is a funeral."

All laughed while the whisky glasses were in their hands.

"Her face is worse than my luck," another one said.

Her voice was drowned. She saw the man sitting with them and knew his intention. It was a battle. Shs strove to gain victory and began to raise her voice "And the world is with me." But alas. How could she by herself defeat a man leading scores of people against her? Bitter jokes assailed her from every direction. She stopped singing and tried another weapon. She began to dance but she was not a good dancer. She moved her hands monotonously.

"Bend, Up, Stretch, Bend, Up," all at once, they repeated with him. She could not stand it. Members of the band were embarrassed and she withdrew from the stage humbly with tears.

The man stood up with an air of triumph. He made his way back to where he had been sitting. Mikha, the night club proprietor, saw everything. He saw the whisky glasses brought by Qassim and the waiters to the front rows and calculated his profit. He went to the singer who was still weeping in the dressing room and told her that she was mistaken in defying one of the celebrities of the town. Then, Mikha managed to persuade her.

"Sajida is sorry. She did not mean it. She's only sick."

The man rose up and asked her to sit by him, laughing.

"I'm sorry, too. But she forced me to do so."

Then he turned his head to her. "Whisky? Gin?"

"Anything," she said.

"Whisky, please," he told Mikha who hastened to meet the order. She still had a desire for weeping but she was obliged to hold back such a desire. She felt a lump in her throat. Her face grew reddish. Tears moistened her eyelashes and her eyes looked in a new frame. The man wished to take her somewhere else.

"Your name's pretty, your face's pretty. Your body must be pretty too. Why don't you dance in the nude like other dancers?"

"A cigarette," she said.

"Why don't you dance in the nude?" he started to pester her again.

"Can I have a cigarette please? she asked again.

She took it from his hand to light it.

"No, no, a woman like you should not light her cigarette with a match. A moment, please."

He drew out his wallet, picked out a ten-dinar note, burnt its edge and brought it closer to the singer's cigarette. She felt some sort of triumph, and the lump in her throat went away. She wished that he had burnt all his money.

"Would you like to spend the night with me?" he asked her.

"No," she said.

"Do you have a lover?"

"No."

"Whey, then?"

She gave no answer and he swallowed a glass of whisky, laughing.

"Sorry, I forgot, you're a chaste dancer."

He laughed loudly with tears. Then, he suddenly fell silent. She was drinking in silence.

"Why are you sad?" he asked her.

"I'm not," she answered.

"Why don't you laugh?"

"Without a reason?" she asked.

"A wine-drinker does not need a reason to laugh."

"I mean a joke."

"A joke?" he said. "You want a joke? Look at the stage, at your colleague and her skinny body dancing and the drunk old man who is dancing around her. It's a joke. Laugh a little."

She looked at the stage. She felt as if they were shouting at her mockingly. "Bend. Up. Stretch."

The sound got amplified and mixed with all these bitter jokes which they made about her. When she looked at the man, she was filled with hate for him. She laughed nervously and threw her cigarette away.

The choking feeling came back to her.

"Can I have a cigarette please?" she asked him.

She held the cigarette and looked at him, waiting for him to take out his wallet.

"Would you light the cigarette for me?" she asked again.

"Oh, of course, of course," he said.

He hastened to take out his wallet and picked a bank-note out of it.

"Only one match?" she asked.

"One? I'll burn the whole match-box, if you like. Just tell me, would you spend the night with me?"

"But, how would you pay the bill?" she gave him an encouraging smile.

"The bill? Indeed, how should I pay the bill? How clever you are!"

She feared that he would change his mind and wished that she had not asked him such a question. He was laughing.

"You are still new," he said proudly. "You don't know me. I can buy the night-club, Mikha, the club owner and Qassim. Do you like Qassim and the pack of creatures in the front rows, all of them? They have been making fun of you tonight."

"Never mind. I'm sorry, very sorry. I'll make them applaud you. But, only tell me, would you stay up with me tonight?" She gave no answer. She held her cigarette closer to him.

"Would you light the cigarette?"

"Would you spend the night with me?"

"Light the cigarette for me?"

He took out many bank-notes and burnt their edges. She hastened to light her cigarette. The flame began to devour the pack of notes. Before his fingers got burnt, he threw it on the ground and crushed it with his feet, as he was laughing. She laughed too, feeling that she had avenged herself. She laughed loudly and wholeheartedly this time. Those sitting by saw the pack burning. They looked at them in astonishment. The effect of whisky given to them by the man had vanished from the heads of creatures used to sitting in the front rows. Their eyes were fixed on the ash of the bank-notes. An awkward silence prevailed over them.

"Why have you kept silent, applaud. We're brothers." One of them, who seemed to be drunk, suddenly cried out. Then, he sent out a laugh like a howl but nobody joined him.

Translated by Adnan Salman

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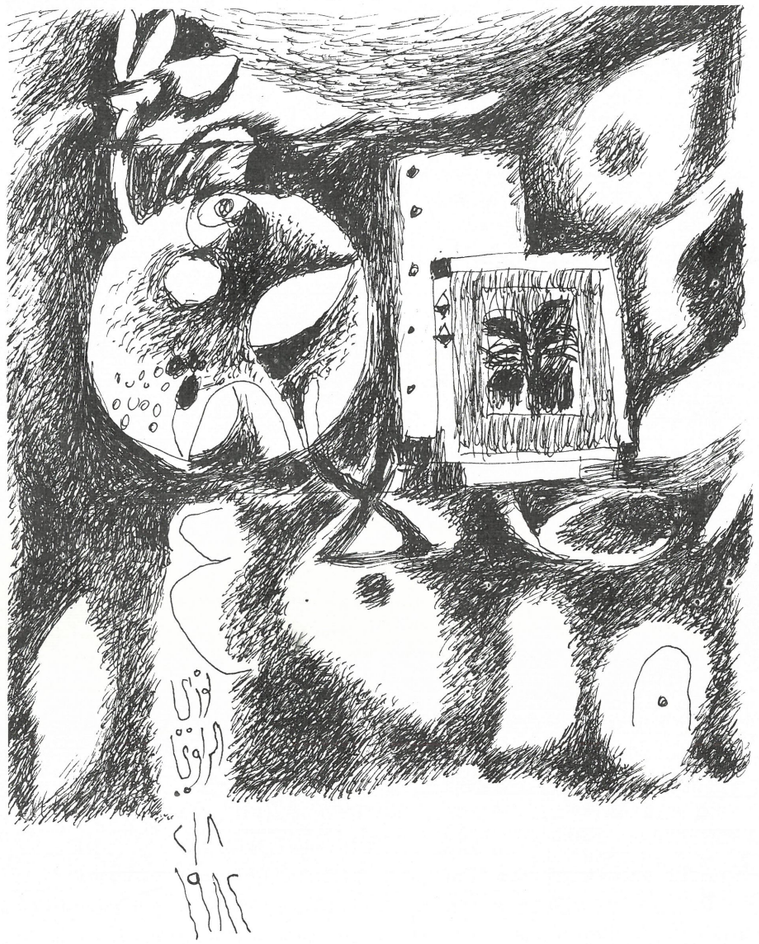
(1) Iqal: a headband made of camel's hair.

(2) Arak: local Iraqi alcohol made of grapes or dates.



Musa Kraidi

Musa Kraidi was born in Najaf in 1940. He graduated from Arts College, Arabic Language Department, Baghdad University, 1965. He has been working as the editor-in-chief of the Small Encyclopaedia since 1977.

Musa Karaidi is the author of the following collections of stories: **Voices in the City** *(1968),* **The Traveller's Steps Towards Death** *(1970),* **Half-Lit Rooms** *(1979),* **The Spaces of Soul** *(1986). He has also written several critical studies on stories and novels.*

The writer tends to explore the tragic aspects as well as the local colours of social life in Iraq through his panoramic depiction of a fusion of visions, times and consciousness.

Midnight Corridor

I heard him calling to me. As I turned back, he whispered a few words, stretched his arm out and shook hands with me. I felt his palm sweating. However, when I freed my hand he gave me a look that I could not understand. He could see that my eyes showed both amazement at and ignorance of him.

I went on my way and saw that he was walking right by my side. I first thought that he wasn't going to talk, and thanked God for that, but hardly a moment of silence had passed before I realized that my guess was wrong. He turned and faced me. He seemed to be taller than me, and I stopped and began to examine his wheat-coloured face and his tousled hair.

He said that he knew everything about me and asked with surprise if I didn't remember him. His question did not worry me since my only certainty was that I did not know him. I told him quite frankly that I had to go away from him but he kept walking beside me as if he wanted to declare that he was really present and could annoy me. I thought that my frankness probably offended him, but he stepped forward, opened his arms as if I were a mere child, and said in a clear voice:

"You're really great."

Then I heard him laughing like a maniac. We walked together but a small distance separated us. We arrived at a roundabout. As he stopped laughing, he said he had never been as happy as he was now.

"What makes you so happy, miserable man?" I asked.

"Meeting a special girl like you," he said.

I wondered at his words and asked him what he could mean by that. He said that he would explain it when he had divulged my secrets and discovered my lost cities and my prayers!

Here I thought that the man either mistook me for someone else or that he was mad.

He was about thirty-five years old. His appearance and his quiet voice were not very different from those of other men we come across in our daily life. However, the way he walked and wore his hair made me think he was a happy-go-lucky person, if not a madman.

I should have made him feel ashamed of himself right from the beginning, but he did not respond to my coldness. Civility made me listen and speak to him reluctantly: when he crossed the road with me and walked my way I could not ignore him. He reminded me of my father. His complexion, his tone, his questions, mysteries and other things, were characterisics of my late father who had died leaving only his picture in my head and spirit.

The man was still walking beside me, still talking about the fierce delight that enveloped him. I wanted to protest against his delight but, as usual, I muzzled my protest. When I asked him what he knew about me he fell silent, but soon said in exhausted manner that my suspicions of him prevented him from divulging his secrets. What he knew, he said, would astonish me. I told him that I was not in the least interested in such things but anyone would like to know what others were saying about them. I also told him that I was not worried what people might say about anything I had done as long as I felt I'd been completely right in what I had done at the time.

As we slowed down and crossed from one side of the road to the other, he slipped his hand in his pocket and took a packet of cigarettes and a silvery lighter.

"Do you smoke, Asma'?" he asked before he lit his own cigarette.

"Sometimes," I replied.

"What about now?"

"No!"

I did know whether or not my words showed annoyance. May be.

He began to drag at his cigarettee. The smell of tobacco filled my head. It was strange, I almost wanted to smoke, I postponed that. He kept staring at my face. When our eyes met, the gap widened. I felt as if there were a wall between us and saw in his eyes that he was worried and wondering about something he had not revealed yet.

"You're afraid," he said with a smile.

I turned my face away from him and thought how stupid he was. A girl who did not want to smoke had to be afraid! Afraid of what, and what on earth did he want?

The sun was almost setting. A few green leaves were lying like straws along the road. People say that they were autumn leaves. That's surprising. Since I was born in Baghdad twenty nine years ago or a little more, I had no idea about autumn at home.

The day wore on and I should have been drawing near the alley leading to Sitt Zubaida but everything got mixed up in my head. In which part of Karkh was I ? All roads and alleys are a maze, I can't distinguish between them.

Suddenly I heard him asking me to sit in a coffee house. I did not know whether there was really a coffee house nearby or if he merely invented it. So I told him it was too late and that I should be back home as I did not want to hurt my mother's feelings. I was approaching a bus, slowing down at a bus stop.

"So we'll see each other again," he said.

"Why should we?" I asked.

"Anything wrong with that?"

"No, but ..."

"But what? Will a disaster occur if we meet?"

"You don't see the point."

"What point, Asma'?"

"You call me by my own name whereas I don't even know yours. Don't you have one?"

"It doesn't matter. You'll know it."

I turned away and got into the bus hurriedly while he stood alone on the pavement.

After a day or two, probably more than that because I realize that time slipped rapidly like sand through fingers, I tried to forget that meeting, but in vain. I did not want to remember what had happened. I turned to the river Tigris. It was marvellous, stretching in front of me and murmuring. It was passing by, but there was nobody to welcome his presence. Why? I didn't know. I used to stand like that looking at myself reflected in its surface and talking alone without having anybody to listen, except myself.

The Tigris seemed far from me and when I turned my back to it I thought I did that because I wanted to escape from it by force. If I ran away to the woods,it might be better, but I started walking like a tourist in the alleys of Al-Shawaka district. There I saw the market full of fish, cloth and greengroceries. It was a hot noon when I left my mother, the Tigris, my little brothers, Abu al-Ala and Abu Hayyan books. I wandered between the museum and Qadri cinema and stopped for a while because I heard a sad song coming from a radio.

As the cafes were crowded with people, the roads were also crowded with porters, village women, salesmen, children, carriages, carriage-drivers, salesmen of lottery tickets and chick-pea pots. What on earth do all these things reflect?

A strong smell suddenly attacked me. It made me swerve away. The only thing I could do was to walk aimlessly because I had now crossed the street which led to a roundabout. As soon as I stepped on the pavement, I heard loud noises coming before me. Some people were running at the beginning of an alley, which made me stop and wonder what was going on.

"A funeral."

"It's God's will."

Four people were carrying the coffin and walking silently. Behind them, a group of young people, children, women and a cloud of dust followed. Is there anybody who could see a view like this without shedding a tear? However, and strangely enough, I paid no attention to the scene. When I drew nearer I heard people saying that the dead person was a lovely woman. She was very pretty and in the prime of her youth. She finished her school successfully but the only person left to her was her father who himself died all of a sudden. His death left a vacuum and the girl made up her mind about something when she found that nobody was left to her.

I kept on walking and left my hair to the wind and my mind to imagination. I was carrying both Hamlet and my coffin with me although I was still alive, in fact approaching the thirties. It is a pity, isn't it? Or is the world still safe and sound and the people, all the people, still very happy and enjoying taking a sunbath? Hope I am wrong since I am no enemy of this happy world and hope that George Orwell also was wrong.

I was walking along the pavement repeating poems by John Donne and John Keats. I remembered my girl students at school and how one day I recited to them some of diaries that I then lost and could not find. I also remembered how one student wrote a letter to me and expressed her desire to die although she was still young.

I kept on walking aimlessly carrying D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. Once I passed the ancient building of the museum the picture of that student came back to my mind. It was engraved in my head. I thought that probably Picasso had painted it in his own cubic style. Also I imagined that her face was turning like a fan. In my head there was not only my coffin but many questions as well:Are women human beings? What do they do when they are alone? Could they adapt, for example, to a heap of ashes that was left in an ash tray? What does a woman think of another women? Do they dream? Yes.

She sleeps on the usual bed and has her usual dreams and wakens to the buzzing flies. The flies glitter with green and get fatter in a matter of seconds. She eats like an insect the remaining crusts but stays as a female. What strong impressions this word gives in the East! There, everybody wants her to be female, feminine, perfect feminine.

My mind began to raise questions, but to whom? I do not know. Most likely, these questions were asked to the rain and winds. I was excited and let my mind look inwards and to the past, and ask questions and wonder all the time, but I regretted that our minds could easily become out of action. At that moment, I heard somebody behind shouting: "Asma' ... Asma'" It was the same unknown man calling me. As soon as I saw him with a smile on his lips, I asked, without preparation, "What would you do if you were in her shoes. Wait? Wait for what? Godot or something else?"

The man looked as if he were stunned.

"I can't see your point. What're you saying?"

"I say why do you not pass away?"

"Pass away?"

"Do you wish to finish it off?"

Finish off what?"

"This torture."

"Which torture, Asma'? What's happened?"

With the effect of surprise on him I understood that my mind was making full use of its chance to rebuke, punish, blame and ask him. I realized that the man was now surrounded. He took a break, then lifted his hand and took a paper from under his arm. He kept it moving in front of him, to the right and left.

"What's wrong with you?" I asked.

"Nothing. Nothing" he said in a tired voice.

He repeated that several times. "This girl must be mad," I could read that on his face.

"Anyhow, I'm responsible for myself," I said after a second's pause.

"What're you saying Asma'?"

" I don't care if they call me mad."

"I did not say that. Did you hear me saying such a thing?"

"You say it deep inside."

"That's too much."

"I know what you think deep inside, man."

I was like a sunflower being tossed on the mud and left to the dust and wind. The man volunteered to calm me down. He tried to be nice as most educated people who meet a girl and try to win her heart and later her body. But I don't trust anybody. I have no stamina to listen to any passer-by, let alone accompanying him and learning lessons from him. This man is still chasing me. He might be in love with me, but he remains outside the circle of my attention. To me, he is only a poor actor given a role but unable to play.

The air was still and the sky a piece of sticky cork. The passers-by were still hurrying like ghosts in daytime.

I looked at him closely. His hair was a mess. His lips were rather thick, especially the lower one which looked dark purple. His hands were short and his shirt unbuttoned at the top. The grey suit added some sort of dignity to his appearance.

"You mind walking my fair lady?" he asked.

"Please, first of all I'm not a lady and secondly I'm not fair."

"You're really puzzling."

"That's right, because you won't understand me."

"You must be a puzzle.

"No, I'm not. It's all a matter of understanding."

We were approaching Al-Zawra Park. Cloaked women cast suspicious looks at us. I know that women sitting in gardens are also cruel. They gather there as if they were enchanted women who had only to stare at other women and the passers-by. If you look carefully at their world you will only see hungry eyes, swelling bellies or creased flesh. If you listen to their innocent whispers you will only hear that one of them complains that her husband prefers *arak* to her. A second one says her husband prefers horse racing to her. A third one keeps crying because the father of her nine children is sick. The headmistress Firyal, who got married nine months ago after a love affair, says that the golden cage of marriage turns in less than three months into a slaughter house.

We were standing on the kerb. Someone drove quickly past us and sounded his horn. Another one passed by and made a comment.

We walked along the wall. The man kept his paper under his arm.

"I would like to talk about art, Asma'!" he said in a quiet tone.

"Which art do you mean? The art of chasing women?"

"You're really difficult. What do you think I am?"

"Why're you so surprised?"

"Do you think I'm a womanizer?"

"But don't you want to be like that?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because they say I'm too old for that."

I don't know whether I had hurt his feelings or humiliated him. I did not intend to. Probably I did that because I always speak my mind. I know he has no idea of this and many other things.

"Right. Let us talk in earnest if you have anything to say. Which art do you mean?"

"Painting. Do you like it?"

"Yes, I do. Are you a painter?"

"I was."

"You stopped painting now?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Years ago. Since I was at University."

"And did you go back to it?"

"Not really. I preferred to start writing."

"Write on painting?"

"Yes, some pieces."

"You mean for the papers?"

"Call it what you want. It's my world."

"What do you find in this world?"

"Myself."

"It means that you're failed as a painter. Haven't you?"

"Well. That's true. I've failed, but what could I have done?"

This made think of the saying that "critics are bad writers." When I tilted my head upwards I saw his half-closed eyes as mysterious. His face was shut up.

"Please read the article and you'll know who I am," he said and handed me the paper.

We walked together towards Al-Zawra Park. At that moment I did not have any feeling for him, good or bad. Nor did I hate him. I simply did not know him. Why did he keep his name a secret? He seemed a mysterious man and I know that I like this sort of people in order to discover whether they have a secret or it is merely an illusion to cover some inferiority complex? I say that because all of sudden a stranger entered my world. He knocked at door without asking permission and walked beside me in disguise. We were only a few yards from the park. My eyes were searching for a swallow but the sun looked pale whereas the trees were dark green and distant. He said that he was obsessed by painting and world painters throughout the ages. He even mentioned the names of some of those painters. I told him that it was too early to say that admiring the world's greatest artists means anything, whereas understanding their works is something else.

"I'm fond of arts, but I'm not pretentious," he said.

"How could I know?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, maybe you want me to admire you."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. I think so."

"But isn't there any other way to admire a lady?"

"To pretend you know everything is only one way."

"You know there are thousands of ways."

"And this is only one way."

"It is really difficult to convince you, Asma'."

"Well. Let us assume that I believe you, but you did not mention da Vinci."

As soon as he heard da Vinci's name he closed his eyes, raised his head and shouted like a child; "Oh, you're really great. I have not yet expressed my admiration of this genius. I also have not told you that I'm fascinated by Mona Lisa's smile."

I wondered with surprise and looked at his face and lips that quivered. My memory went back to da Vinci and asked if he had any idea whether da Vinci had painted the Mona Lisa in another way before he put the final touches on his painting since it had no smile. He nodded his head without any comment. Then he began to groan intermittently and secretly. In fact I felt pity for the man because I was surprised. But when I looked at him, I saw that his eyes were fixed on mine. Probably he wanted to read what is written there, but I was not an open book. He wanted to come closer to me, but I was closed in on myself, just as he claimed.

"There's someone who deformed the Mona Lisa. Do you know that?" I asked when I saw him deeply involved in arts and its history.

"Who's that?"

"The Dadaists."

"How?"

"They added a beard and a moustache to the face."

"Why did they do it?"

"You tell me."

"To show they were avante-garde?"

"They were fed-up as well."

"But that doesn't mean they should deform art."

"The Dadaists reject everything. That's the whole point."

"Reject art?"

"No, they reject the traditional conception of arts."

"You really give me a headache."

"Take a couple of aspirin then, and sleep

well."

The man laughed at my suggestion. He thought I was joking. However, he immediately lit another cigarette and was very surprised when he saw me taking a cigarette from my handbag. I gave it to him. He seemed quiet but very tense and worried deep inside. I wanted to travel five centuries in time from da Vinci to Renoir.

"Are you fascinated by any of Renoir's paintings?"

"All of them."

"Like what?"

"Miss Jane Samari."

"Well. Why this particular one?"

"Probably because it creates more than a pleasure inside me."

"So you remember..."

"What?"

"The painting in detail."

"Yes I do."

"Its colours?"

"It has strange and magical colours."

"And what else?"

"They're glittering like beads of contemplation."

"Undoubtedly it is one of his masterpieces."

"You know what it reminds me of?"

"What?"

"Of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, you."

"How?"

"It looks like you, Asma'. Renoir painted you."

"You want to make a fool of me?"

"No, not at all."

He said that and trembled while I kept my lips shut. When I looked at the pavement, he gave a hot sigh as if it were coming from his heart.

I asked him to come closer. When he did so I asked him:

"Do you know Roqantin?"

"He's Sartre's hero," he replied quickly.

"You know what was his problem?"

"Always fed-up."

"Right now, I'm fed-up."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"Leave me alone."

At that moment it was no longer possible to communicate. I was no longer able to cry. The man remained silent. Now he is dreaming. I went back hurriedly to my room which was like a corridor of marble standing in the night.

My mother called me and I hurried to her. She talked to me about him. In her imagination, she drew an amazing picture of him. His name was As'ad. He was snow-white with fat face and neck. A red tie pressed hard on his neck. His eyes were quite big and glowing quietly. His hair was black as his eyes. As'ad was smartly-dressed gentle and well-behaved. He was always merry. He has never read a book, never seen a painting and has watched only Baghdad TV. Fortunately, I have seen him only three times all my life during which I replied to his questions with Yes or No only. He tried to appear gentle and merry by telling jokes. When I nodded my head he thought I got his jokes. He was my cousin. Unfortunately, if a boy has a cousin they tell him she will become his future wife.

I told my mother to give me the chance to find this handsome man a nice girl. I was thinking at the moment of Sa'diya, one of my colleagues at school, supposing that they were suited and would be very happy. However, I dismissed that idea and blamed myself for being so foolish as to decide other people's destiny.

After that I left my mother with surprise on her face. She shook her head and looked as if she had lost some dear one. She couldn't understand me. That is why she remained puzzled.

I returned to my world and took shelter in my corridor. It was small and contained a chair, a desk, modest seats on which there were some books, an inkpot, notebooks and paper tissues. I went on reading Barbusse's *L'Enfer* and realized that there were still two other books to read through.

The day passed as usual and the evening fell. I had only a little meal then went on to

my reading. My mother and little brothers and sisters went to sleep but I could not. I took the paper and saw the article he wrote about painting. His real name was Subhi Sarhan. Why did he hide it from me? I did not know. Does his name have any echo in my memory or other places? I don't think so. Even if he were a mere shadow, what did it mean? I looked at a painting of Dante and wondered when I would go back to his purgatory. I put the paper down, feeling ashamed.

I woke up early in the morning and went back to the article and read it. I thought if the abstract in painting is considered an art, it will be considered something wrong in our speech. Moreover, since when has an artist given explanations of his paintings throughout the ages?

Once I finished reading the article I felt bored so I went out to get some fresh air. In a few minutes, I found myself in a separate and curved open place in which there was a bench surrounded by thick trees. The sun streaked through the leaves and branches. The sky could be seen dark blue. The place was still except for sparrows that crowded among the branches. I could swear that nobody would come to that area but some people did come when they saw a lovely girl sitting on a bare bench in the corner.

Then I left the place to the crowded street. When I got on the bus I wondered when I would be at home. The window beside me was open. As the bus moved I felt something like a splash of somebody spitting on me. I felt it coming from the upper deck. I was terrified and ground my teeth.

When I arrived home I went to take a shower to clean off the dust. I felt relaxed and light, but I did not stay for a long time under the shower, so I came out of the bath and found myself jumping like a mad woman to the mirror. I stood in front of it for hours colouring my lips with the lipstick and putting make up on my eyelids and eyelashes. I also put some spray under my arms and on my hair and neck. My golden belt would always be around my waist and glittering on a variety of colours. Before I selected the handbag that would match the colour of my shoes, I bent down to see if my shoes had lost some of their shine or the skin-colour of my tights was faded away. Once my appearance looks very smart I go out to the light and draw near his world. His caring hand would receive me and in his tent I would find shelter. The people would see us walking hand in hand and smiling to everyone. If anybody saw us he would certainly be jealous as we were the most beautiful couple, the happiest creatures. Jealous people are as many as flies. Why should we pay attention to them as we walk in the crowded streets? Before anyone asked he would say that I was his fiancee. It was a big lie and I would show my rejection by shaking my head.

"Shut up," he would say in a rough voice and with a nudge from his arm.

We walk together, if we by chance met a friend who would invite us to see a movie at a cinema, he would proudly smile and say:

"Thank you. We are invited to a party."

"What a consolation!" I exclaimed.

"You said consolation?" he asked as if he were stung suddenly.

"Yes. Don't you want to get married?"

"Yes, I want to get married to you."

"That's the consolation, then. Isn't it?"

"What're you saying? You're really daft."

Yes, I am indeed. So leave me."

We continue walking but away from each other this time. He walked hurriedly and was soon enveloped in the street's noises — whereas I walked towards a waterfall. In a few minutes I found myself fascinated by the waterfall and its roar.

When I woke up I found that I was still lying on my bed. My limbs were numb and my eyelids were heavy, so I thought of getting up. I stood in front of the mirror and looked at my figure. Blue circles were surrounding my eyes which I could hardly open. An idea came to my mind to lift the mirror and place it under the bed. Before I

tried to do so, I caught sight of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noire*. I wanted to go back to it again, but I had already promised myself to read Dante's *Purgatory*.

At that moment I heard a knock at the door. It was so light as if someone was tapping with his fingertips. There was nobody else at home, so I went down to see who it was.

When I opened the door, there was a fairly pretty girl whom I discovered after a short scrutiny to be one of my students. Her name was Layla Sarhan. She smiled at me shyly.

"Come on in," I said and welcomed her.

"No, thank you, I'm sorry to disturb you."

"No. Not at all."

Then she slipped her hand into her handbag and took a letter from it.

"I got a letter for you."

"Thank you very much. Who sent it?"

"My brother."

"Your brother? What's his name?"

"Subhi."

I was so surprised because I thought that he had stepped out of my life. I took the letter unwillingly and saw Layla smiling nervously. She seemed to have done something she did not want to do.

"Our house is so near," she said before she disappeared in the darkness.

"Where?" I asked her.

"At the end of the alley."

"On the right hand side?"

"Exactly. The last house on the right."

I hesitated to open the letter because I thought I would cause myself some unnecessary trouble. What am I to do with this romantic nonsense in which the man had put all his trust? Probably he wanted me to read the letter and then faint, if not cry a river! I left the letter unopened and remembered Max Ernest who never opened a letter in his life. I regretted taking the letter from Layla. Finally I opened it but found to my surprise, instead of an ordinary letter, extracts from my diaries. Subhi seized my diaries which I had lost one day at school. Suddenly I realized the mystery of his helplessness and understood why he said that one day he would divulge my secrets and why he kept chasing me. Everything seemed to have happened in this way. Layla had one day found by chance the diaries and kept them for one reason or another. Subhi, however, stole them as soon as he discovered them and also kept them for himself. By so doing he probably thought he would put me in a difficult position or he would make me a friend. Probably he thought he would use it as a means of communication that will ultimately end up by exchanging letters, but he knew nothing about me or who I am. I also don't think he would understand anything I wrote in my notebooks I suppose he is unable to understand what personal writings mean. I am not to blame, am I? Have I done anything wrong to anybody?

That day wore on in trivial things. Everyday wore on is a waste. Today it is my twenty-ninth birthday. It is all lost. My face is colourless. Nobody will sing me "Happy birthday to you" Nonsense... Nonsense...

This time my eyes fell on a round silver tray crowded with green myrtle, some finger-like candles, sweeties and other things I could not recognise. Close to this there were also several small earthenware jars that appeared in their pale yellow colour as if they were dead faces. My mother stood there while I cast cloudy look at the tray. Her thin face seemed to brighten with joy that I could not understand its secret. However, that signified her total satisfaction. The children were happily laughing and whispering beside her. I did not understand anything.

"What have you done all this for?" I asked my mother as she wiped her sweating forehead.

"For us."

"Why?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"It's Zakariya Day."

I went out to the alley. There were some noises and a gentle wind slapping my face while the sunrays fell on my eyes. Then the evening came. In the dim light of the alley, Subhi's ghost appeared. I did not expect to see him though I wanted to talk to him about my papers.

"Where did you hide the diaries, Subhi?"

"Sorry about that. I'll get them for you."

"Why did you do that?"

"Asma'"

"You did not answer my question."

"I love you Asma'!"

"In such a short time?"

"Yes."

"You love me? Why?"

"Don't you deserve me?"

"No."

"How can you say that?"

"I personally don't know you until now."

"And our meetings?"

"Just nonsense."

I saw that his face was small and pale. Also, I imagined at that moment that there was a deep hollow in his eyes.

"You don't want to understand."

"Understand what?"

"What is expressed by language."

"Which language?"

"You see?"

"I can read you very well."

"You only deceive yourself."

"I know you very well."

"You liar. There is no common language between us."

Silence reigned and he stopped looking at me. In fact he deliberately turned his face away from me. He went home and came back with the notebooks. At that moment we looked at each other only for a short time. I left him and went back home. When he was far from me, I felt very much relieved. On my way home, I saw women, children and all the old people of the alley teeming at the entrance of the alley. There were shouts and noises of people rejoicing. They said a marriage will occur. But hours passed without seeing any wedding. Instead I saw a number of drummers rushing like Dervishes across the thresholds of the houses with their music. As the sound of tambourines and cymbals mixed with each other, heads and legs also were shaken amid the lights and strange colours. Men kept flocking in until midnight. I was among them but said nothing. I was a woman among them and listening to the desert beats of my heart

Translated by
Mohammed Darweesh

Warid Badr al-Salim

Warid Badr al-Salim was born in Basra in 1956. He is a garduate of the Technical Institute. His only published volume of short stories is entitled ***"That Beautiful Weeping"*** *1983. His works in print are* ***"The Most Beautiful Woman,"*** *short stories, and* ***"The Ravens"*** *a novel.*

Although he started to write in the mid 1970s, al-Salim's writings have actually matured only after the Iraq-Iran war had broken out. His writing then was simple and documentary, but his more recent war stories brought him the necessary fame to establish his name as an important young writer. He is interested in the drastic changes the war has brought about. Therefore he seems to be an acute observer who truthfully records the violent confrontation. No wonder that some of his stories won various awards and were translated into English, French, Kurdish and Turkish languages.

The Dream of the Red Anemones

All of a sudden, he realised that the rays of the hot sun had all focused on his head as a burning blade or a spear of fire. This he felt while forcing himself to hurry through the dried grass and low hills, charred craters and dried up irrigation channels. He felt as if he were on fire, his fatigue uniform pricking his lean body. Pain crept through his head, gradually numbing his senses. His eyes were drawn to the tank emplacements in the ever-receding distance; they appeared to him sinking in a mirage, spreading across the desert sands like a flood. He saw objects floating in a large lake of clear, shallow, motionless water, or of thin smoke. Heavy clouds brooded over the screens and trenches which laboured to avoid sinking into water, smoke or mirage.

He chose a direct route to the regiment, but he felt, only now, that it would have been better to wait until the evening, after sunset, when the bunkers are enshrouded by the cover of night and breathe sweet, fresh coolness as well. His arrival would have been safer with the fuel or ration-truck, or other vehicles coming from brigade headquarters or some other rear headquarters. However, he persuaded himself that he should soon rejoin his tank unit.

This made him recall the busy town of Ashar which he had left the day before and the last words of Abdul Nabi, the canteen-owner who had looked distinctly worried and quite overcome by anxiety during the last two days of leave. He felt it was too difficult to wait, but. ...

* * *

"I was submerged in a surging human wave whose beginning or end I could not make out," he wondered. "I found myself squeezed between shoulders and heads in search of cool shades and faces I had lost sight of long ago. I felt like looking around and searching for something, anything, that would fill the solitude which I had begun to feel right from the first day of my leave. Though the solitude lasted only a while, it was unbearably acute. It accompanies me in the cafes, in the street, in the bustling bazaar and even when I carried home friends' letters of love to their families."

"Never mind Sabbar," he said to himself. "You can stand the sun even if it pours fire

on your head. Minutes of thirst and gasping for breath, then you will rest. Your good mate, the warrant officer Abdul Razzaq, known to his friends as Abu Ilham, your close friend corporal Salman and Abu Falah, the older man of the tank squad and veteran tank driver will welcome you. They will open their arms in a warm embrace. 'Hello there, sharpshooter', they will say to you. 'You're looking well. Hope you'd a good leave.'"

"You will get friendly shoves and slaps on the back," he contended himself. "They will say, 'Eh, boy! How're you? Bet you enjoyed your leave'."

"Abu Ilham will behave as usual," he continued to wonder. "He will plunge your head in a barrel of water and you will feel as if all the heat of the world were extinguished in your head. The hot blade will cool and the spear of fire will shatter. What a pleasant feeling. Weariness will dissolve and evaporate from your pores. Salman will quench your thirst with a bowl of cool fresh yogurt. You will be intoxicated by the sweet rest. You will even suddenly feel fresh inside. They will gather around you, stirring the shelter's air with fans made of palm leaves. You will even say, 'You embarrass me, lads. Nice to see you. I'm really glad to be back. Eh. Any news of fighting?' "

* * *

His legs weakened as if their blood ran thin. His eyelashes were drenched in sweat which tasted salty as it trickled down his temples to the dry corners of his mouth. He would not let himself sit down: the ground was still too hot and he was too exposed to the enemy. He had to reach forward positions. Yet, he gave in to the exhaustion which had been biting at every point of his body. He sat down as if thick ropes dragged him to the cracked earth. The army-issue beret he was wearing felt so hot to his touch that it made him think of a fish being grilled over his head.He turned up the collar of his fatigue uniform and looked into the encroaching, but ever-receding distance. "Perhaps I've got mixed up" he thought in alarm, because he knew very well that to reach the earthwork would take only a few minutes in a truck despite the bumps, the dug-up hills and the clumps of dried clay.

* * *

"Never mind Sabbar," he said to himself. "Abdul Nabi, the canteen-owner, told you that the enemy might launch his large-scale offensive the following night. But what coincidence made you meet Abdul Nabi on that lovely fresh, though humid morning? The best thing for you to do Sabbar — or rather it is your duty — is to be with your mates early in the morning. Do not be late. You will surprise them by cutting short your leave and you will no doubt be sad. Your eyes will give you away. Your bewilderment will make them wonder what is wrong."

* * *

"After wandering aimlessly around, I found myself once again submerged in human waves," Sabbar said to himself. "Through the surging crowds I saw the face that entranced me, like the first glint of dawn on a spring morning. I was struck by a great desire for something I had missed on all my previous leaves, which I had spent lingering and killing time. I found myself attracted to a young girl. Her body swathed in a shining cloak. Her wide-open eyes pierced my chest. In search of her, I crossed a crowd of people. I approached her in an oppressive fear when she stopped to look at books and the covers of magazines displayed behind a big glass window that reflected children's faces and men's and women's legs. Her face was exactly like a child's. Her wide-open eyes made me so sad that I was overwhelmed by a desire to cry. I was stunned when she looked right towards me. Just like that, she had turned around suddenly and I was electrified. I believed that many distances had to melt away

and many threads had to be cut in order for me to be calm and collected in front of her. I just brooded over her face and terrible things cried out deep inside me. I felt, for the first time, that her wide-open eyes contained a weak submissive person who had lost not only the power to speak, but even to nod, a man whose eyes withered and things became foggy around him except for her little bright face which began to flash through his heart.

"In the twinkling of an eye, I was overtaken by an obsessive dream to meet by chance a lady on the road. A dialogue would ensue between us about something or the other. Or we would walk silently in an orchard rich with trees and roses and full of sparrows. I was fascinated by that sweet dream which swayed in my head like a gentle breeze during the nights at the front that were full of heavy rains.

"Through the sheets of rain, a woman's face would be revealed bright as a result of a flash of lightning. I had the feeling that she was with me on the earthwork and that she was the hand that would trigger off the gun."

* * *

From the nearby bushes, a transparent mirage began to rise slowly as some life-giving water had begun to evaporate. His eyes followed those thin vapours. However it soon disappeared in the sunlight. He stared again at the nearby bunkers and at those in the distance.

* * *

"Over there are my dear mates," he thought. "I won't stay at home on my own. We'll have to fight alongside each other. There is still time to get there, despite the deadly heat and irritating thirst. Salman, my good friend, believe you me, I did post the letters befor going home. It's a duty, Salman, the lover. Yesterday I discovered the fire that had been burning inside you while you kept silent as the sphinx. Is loving so burning and beautiful? Only yesterday, I realised your daily astonishment at the sparrows, larks, green sticks, nests of wild birds and spring flowers that the shelling always burnt. Now I understand that they were the thin transparent expression of a deep, innocent love, which never flowed.

"How can I ever forget your night duties which lasted until the grey dawn? How can I ever forget your fire and fury during fierce battles?

"Once I noticed that he had been silent throughout the day as if he were thinking of a complicated or difficult matter that made him look really pathetic.

"Eh, Salman! You're carried away by love" I gave him once a fright out of mischief. I was convinced that a kaleidoscope of pictures had been confused in his head as if he had awake from a dream he wished to be endless. So a rattle came out of him like a sign of a cry or disrupted weeping.

"I realised that I had unearthed a deep secret which floated, at that moment, on his blinking eyes under the light coming through cracks in the bunker.

" One night when the moonlight lasted until dawn, he confessed to us all. Salman talked about a girl he was madly in love with. He said in fascination that he could see her at the most critical times. Inside me, I began to imagine Salman's sweetheart. I did not know why. That night I could not find a face more glamorous than the shining moon with its lustrous silver colour and dazzling clarity."

* * *

In the ever-receding distance, a few sporadic shells fell on or in front of the earthwork on the bunkers of the ambushers. Sabbar gazed at clouds of black smoke rising over there while he played with the roots of a small plant that gave in to a slow death, then he uprooted it with his hand and smelled the stigma of its small flowers. Hot particles of dust went through his nostrils. He took off his uniform, put it on his head like a cloack, took some rest and hurried towards the mirage. He was unaware of two larks which swept over his head to land behind.

"Damn them," he thought. "I'll walk into the unit like a bedouin who has crossed an empty desert and got the skin of his bare feet cracked. I'll find Salman in the hot cockpit while Abu Ilham is being grilled in the bunker and Abu Falah, the oldest man of the squad, will be examining his bushy chest as if searching for lice that had reached him the day before. And he ... Salman 'll shout if he sees me.

"He'll see me like a black dot swimming in the lake of the mirage. Now I'm in a transport flood. I'll no doubt appear floating, but Salman 'll put the binoculars to his eyes to see me right in front of him, less than a metre away."

* * *

"Why did he take the risk in this cruel midday sun?" he asked himself. He even imagined his mates were shouting suddenly, "That's Sabbar, Sir"

He wondered if he shouldn't have waited until the evning to come with the fuel-truck. However, Sabbar thought the reception will be great.

"Hello, Sabbar," they'll all shout. "We're eager to see you, lion."

"It's terrible without you," someone will say.

"The sun's burnt your head, Eh!" a second mate will tell you.

"Let him rest," Abu Ilham 'll say. "Here's cold water."

"No, here's yogurt. It's much better."

* * *

The mirage was still like roaring waves. A shell pierced it. It was a tracer shell, whose white column of smoke burst out and rose. Flakes of ash fell like snow. Then two more shells fell either side and the earth shook. The guns rumbled behind the far river like the slamming of iron doors. A swishing scream was heard in the air and suddenly the land was blown up by three other shells.

"I said to myself I had to slow down," Sabbar thought. "The distance beside me remained far away and sank into a new mirage. In front of me, the hot land stretched out, ploughed by the sun, shells from previous days and dry, odourless bushes: camel-thorns, thorns, alfalfa and brambles. I came to a dry ditch which crossed a deserted road. On the sides of the ditch, green moss had dried and lost its colour. I hid in the dry course of the ditch, but the shelling came nearer.

"Columns of smoke rose from the regiment's positions. There must be fires, because everything I saw was burning. Deep down inside, I was struck with fear. I said I'll cover the rest of the distance by running. Those positions are undoubtedly near, but the mirage is deceptive. In a few minutes I'll be in the arms of friends. I'll talk to Salman about the young girl with the wide-open eyes in particular. Anyway, for your sake, friends in life and death, everything is bearable."

* * *

The shelling intensified. It blew out the earthworks by heavy shells and the rockets' red fins.

* * *

"Probably they'll begin their offensive at noon," he said to himself.

* * *

For the first time, Sabbar felt that time hung heavy, the minutes slow and the distance long. He was bewildered and fatigue and felt mysteriously that he was a stranger and that he had followed the wrong track. He said that he would run, but he felt thirsty and tired. He lacked the strength to face the random shelling.

"If I had been attacked by a platoon, I wouldn't have shaken with fear," Sabbar wondered. "I would rather fight tooth and nail."

He realised he was really besieged.

"Salman 'll draw me by the binoculars and say: 'That's Sabbar', Sabbar raved. "When I arrive I'll tell him something about the young girl with the wide-open eyes. I'll tell him how I lost her in a crowd of people when I met Abdul Nabi who told me about the enemy's probable offensive. I left her, Salman, with something strange quivering in my heart. Neither she nor I said anything. We're like two lost sheep. Then we parted without a single word."

* * *

Sabbar came out of the deserted ditch. The land shook and he threw himself on the dry grass. It broke underneath him. He smelt gunpowder and heard sweeping pieces of shrapnel hissing in the air. They fell like the remains of something destroyed.

"I'll run for minutes, may be two minutes," he decided "That mirage began to fade away. It is deceptive, Sabbar. Those are the battalion positions and those are the tanks resting like dinosaurs."

* * *

Like whips, hot winds continued to lash his face. Sand particles bounced and pecked at his eyes, his blazing forhead, dry mouth and stiffened neck like sharp pricks.

"Salman ... Salman ...Sal .. ma ... n" he found himself shouting while he was rushing through the dry scrub. Then he found himself very heavy as if his feet were chained like a prisoner's.

""I've got to arrive at the base and to fight along with my units," he said to himself. "It's absurd to be caught by a stupid hail of shrapnell. Oof, if there was a whole platoon, a company in front of me, by God, I wouldn't shake with fear and wouldn't worry. A high-explosive bomb and everything would come to an end. Even if there was a score of tanks in front of me, but ...

"Salman ... Why do I stick to this Salman, the lover. Oh. God. If you just give me a chance to get there."

He saw the mirage fading away, its transparent clouds floating over the infantry companies and no-man's land.

"That's the final round, Sabbar. Run," he encouraged himself.

A distant round of bullets rattled like steel chains. He felt the ground becoming soft under his hurried feet.

"What happened? Salm ..a. a...an," he shouted.

He quickly realised, as he fell in a heap on the hot sand, that things began to separate from him and dissolve in the mirage. He also realised that a weak, exhausted man had begun to rave on a land set ablaze.

He strove to remember something. The damp bunker and the tearful eyes of friends came back to his mind. He stared firmly in stupefacation at the ceiling. He saw tin cans, criss-crossed timbers and carefully arranged sandbags. He became more aware that something would choke in his throat and that a stubborn mine would explode inside him. Things seemed to have become enshrouded in mist and surrounded by mirage, except for a moment which managed a cheat death. At that moment he remembered the roar of the explosion and the mountain of dust while he was ascending to heaven.

He felt that he was then beyond the limits of the universe and its huge gravity. A cool evening covered him and a wide lake of red anemones stretched under him. Millions of butterflies flew over his head, up and down, like an umbrella with coloured flowers.

Translated by Mohammed Darweesh

Extracts from Jewad Selim's Journals

Jewad Selim's journals were carefully studied and edited by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and published in his book, 'The Eighth Voyage' in 1967.

The existence of the journals was revealed after the artist's death. There was so much in them which could not be published.

The journals were interspersed with many drawings and sketches, uneven in quality but all very lively and significant.

The first entry of the journals is dated October 11, 1941 which means that the artist started them when he was only 22 years old. The journals cover a period of just under three years. It was, however, a period of great fertility in the artist's work and thought.

September 23, 1943

The events and circumstances of this winter have had serious effect on the course of my life. The year marked a turning point in my career in relation to painting. When I was in Paris, I did not give much attention to painting despite my great love for it, particularly the modern French school (he meant the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist school). When I returned to Baghdad I knew nothing about this school which I had admired. In Paris, there were only few persons who showed full appreciation of this school and knew all its secrets. This was because the trend of painting was led in those days by a group including Picasso, Matisse, Braque and Dali. Paris received those painters warmly since it saw in them the remedy for its exhausted and weary nerves. A few painters followed in the footsteps of Cezanne. The greatest of those painters now is Pierre Bonnard who is seen as the most notable colourist at present.

Twenty years ago, a group of Polish painters who were fond of the modern French school came to Paris with their teacher, a friend of Bonnard. They remained one year in Paris to know about the splendour of this school and its secrets through learning at the hands of Bonnard and listening to lectures on sculpture in the museums. Then, they returned to their country where they became notable painters, the names of some of them I saw in Paris and Europe.

When the Second World War broke out, some of them came to Baghdad and got acquainted with Faiq Hassan and me through our annual art exhibition.

They were immensely thrilled when they knew we were "Parisians" Thus we struck up a close friendship that helped us to bring out the influence of Paris in our paintings as much as we could and as much as Baghdad could afford. Through them, I've come to know things which I have never dreamt of, things which have had a very great effect on the course of my career. I have come to know who the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists are and the value of modern French school. I have known what colour means and the way colours are used. I have come to understand the paintings of Cezanne, Renoir and Van Gogh, the paintings of Goya and the eastern paintings ... etc. I have known much more than that. I have known the value of time.

We used to work the whole day ceaselessly. In tne evening, we would meet at the Brazilian cafe to have French coffee and a long chat about everything. We called this cafe "Cafe Dome." We were the last to leave the cafe. Meanwhile we became the target of hatred and were attacked by some people who accused us of putting on airs. But we did not care because we were spirited day-by-day by the new information we were getting. The gossip made by those friends did not bother us because of our strong faith.

The artist who seeks to attain his goal should devote all his energies and life, particularly in these days, to his work. He should assimilate his heritage to bring out something new, for heritage is a wonderful realm. Thanks to circumstances which helped me to comprehend this new fact. I shall proceed from it with open eyes and heart on a bright path. A year ago, my path was dark since it was not illuminated by knowledge. In all the countries of the world, there are colours even in the Never Never land and the land of the Eskimo. The world is full of colours. Even in the mud of our roads, there are millions of colours.

The French painters have benefited a great deal from their profound study of oriental pictures.

Have a look at the whole oriental pictures from the country of the Rising Sun to Africa. Take, for example, the pictures of Yahya Al-Wasiti,the greatest of painters in Iraq, the country of date-palms, which you described as "colourless." He immortalized it in his pictures and colours, or in fact he immortalized himself because his pictures were quite different from what he saw in front of him. He was a creative artist.

Take, for instance, Al-Wasiti's picture enlarged by Atta Sabri who chose it from Maqamat Al-Hariri. The picture shows a group of camels, and you know Iraq's camels. Their colour is not different from that of dust. This man of genius created harmony between the colour of every camel and that of the one beside it.

Monsieur Chabski is one of the noted Polish painters and a famous critic in Europe. His words are strongly impressed on my memory. "Do you like your country?" Once he asked us. "No," replied someone among us. "You are mistaken," said Chabski, "one cannot be creative in something he does not like. You can't be a somebody, if you don't have a profound and genuine love for the country in which you live. Take, for example, the French painters."

He admired my paintings very much, saying they were new and if I managed to bring this drawing to life with colours, I would identify myself and achieve something that distinguishes me from others. "You should make use of the absence of great European painters from your country which is rich in colours and themes," he told me.

January 15, 1944

Art, like any other cultural movement, is influenced by the developments of war and its results. The First World War gave rise to a new intellectual movement in Europe and new schools in poetry, music, painting and sculpture. They were called "Between-the-two-Wars" schools and intellectual developments. European critics' evaluation of this art has been diverse. But surrealism, the latest product of these schools, gives an idea of the degree of sophistication reached by these schools.

In Iraq, though it is recently developed, art is bound to be influenced, more or less, by these overriding developments. However, I am very hopeful that painting in Iraq will have a very promising future. This optimism is due firstly to the fact that the Iraqi artist is relatively far from the arena of the war and is deeply absorbed in his own work. Secondly the war circumstances have given him the opportunity of meeting various foreign artists including English, Polish and others.

I often compare sculpture to composers because the composer's production has much to do with his audience. The bigger the audience are, the better his music is in form and quality. The smaller they are, the less he produces and the less the value of his music becomes. The composer can only compose symphony or opera when he is asked to do so by the state or big private bodies. The same is true of the sculptor. Often, he can only work for the government or private societies. Further, the message conveyed by a piece of music has resemblance to that of a monument which embodies a noble idea for the public.

Scuplture has a promising future in Iraq because our museums and squares lack sculptural pieces. Just as Europe experienced a broad artistic revival after the Great War — setting up monuments and involving sculptors and architects in this campaign — the end of this war will open up a broader prospect for artists to take part in shaping a bright and good world.

May 29, 1944

For the first time in my life I, who had never been pessimist, was filled with despair. I despaired of the future. I do not want to be a victim of my work. I want to live like other people because I shall die like them. I began to think seriously of my case. The more one ages the more realistic he becomes. I do not want to be like Rossetti dividing his ability between poetry and painting, not knowing which one he masters more. Rossetti lived in an endless state of prosperity and calm. For me, at this era called the 20th century, to dissipate my energy between painting and sculpture is definitely going to lead nowhere.

I think of freeing myself from painting one day since I have no doubt that it is not the think I live for. It does not give a true expression of myself. In the latest spring exhibition held by the Friends of Art, I put on display the best eight oil paintings I had done. I received many congratulations on the occasion. The paintings were admired by a young well-educated English painter who showered me with praise. Despite all this, I did not feel that this was the thing that gave full expression of my ability. Among the exhibits was a small piece of Iraqi marble which I called The Black River. I made something out of it after I had pondered a great deal over it and executed it in two months after ceaseless work. I put it up for sale at a very cheap price but no one bought it and it was only admired by a few persons. When I see it, it gives me

some sort of pride and comfort.

About sixty exhibitions were opened in Baghdad this year. On the last day of our latest Spring Exhibition, I gave a lecture on artistic work. It covered all my knowledge, experience and research about art and the artist's work. Now, I have a new lecture of a strange type. I shall make it resounding. Its theme is art in modern Iraq, art in houses and streets and in every aspect of Iraqi life. I began with it some time ago and gathered many examples and facts to prepare it.

The idea of this lecture came to my mind after having heard what has been said about Iraqi art particularly by Captain Tullist. In this lecture, I shall sharply attack every dead or ugly thing.

November 16, 1944

I am one of those who believe in future. I have trust in future and believe that the good and the best shall win. Every man is looking forward to future. It is very close. Tomorrow, peace will advance on and spectres of death and instruments of evil will end. Has not Paris, the Mecca of art gained its liberation? Has not Picasso come out of the seclusion of his own home, which continued for four years during which he did not see Paris? Now Picasso says, "the intentions of the creative artist today is to keep mankind away from sinking deep into chaos." These were his words after the liberation of Paris.

During those four years, Paris and Europe, unlike Baghdad, ceased to produce fine works. Baghdad, meanwhile, though poor and ignorant was working slowly and quietly. At the time, the first Institute of Fine Arts and the first government museum of painting and sculpture were opened. A vigorous movement in theatre and classical and national music started. There were only a few artists, beset by difficulties in their work and their attempt to pave the way for the rising generation. After a recess of five centuries, it was a difficult task for the pioneers. They sought to reconcile Arabesque and ancient art of Mesopotamia with the modern art influenced by London, Paris and Rome.

As for the audience, though it was naive and incapable of developing a taste for the new thing, it provided the artist with a fertile soil to sow the seeds of a new education.

At the time, many people returned home from Europe where they were denied the opportunity of production. Baghdad paved the way for them to work and opened for the artists among them a new realm of visible things under its picturesque domes. Those people were not students of the Beaux Arts in Paris nor of the Slade School in London. They had new ideas and used to inspire their artistic production with extracts of their meditations, studies and imagination. Those foreigners have left their influence on Iraqi artists. All those artists, Iraqis and foreigners, were bound by love of life and simplicity which could make us forget death. They were human more than artists.

October 3, 1945

A few days ago, I finished the execution of the Master Building in which, I hope I have achieved the thing I looked for.

The idea of doing such a work took shape in my mind some years ago. The moment of inspiration came when I saw Taha, the only builder in Iraq involved in doing decorations. He used to work carefully and calmly at the Abbasid Palace corridor. I liked him and admired his way of working and the historical and artistic glory of the things he tried to restore.

This scene brought many ideas and images to my mind so I made direct contacts with master builders and apprentices during the building of my new house. When I was young, I admired the master builder while he was working swiftly, laying one brick on top of the other very carefully. Apprentices used to gather around him while he related some stories he imagined, some events concerning his occupation and his love for his work.

I know that this craft is not as it was in the ancient times in Iraq, when it was sanctified by those practising it and got engrossed in it. There are no longer builders who can create the like of Marjan Mosque or Alhambra. While studying this subject, I was obliged to draw on the past, on the ancient domes of which the Arabs are proud.

I took the name Master Builder from Ibsen's play which is about a builder who dies for his art. In the course of time, the subject began to take on a new shape in my mind. I took a practical step when I asked some people to bring me a large flat piece of rock from Mosul. When I went to the Institute of Fine Arts, where I work, the idea had not yet crystalized. I would sit for hours before its white and polished surface seeing forms and pictures coming out from this rock. I drew several pictures. Then, I resorted to clay

in the hope that I would achieve something until the idea took shape last summer when I began to engrave something on the stone. If I were to explain what I engraved, I would say it was no more than some kind of form. But it is better to keep silent. I should, however, say that apart from myself, nature and modern trends, I sought inspiration from several artistic trends; Egyptian, Assyrian and Gothic. This is quite natural. The way of execution included two directions: the first one with which I began was elementary, rough with pure lines and unbridled emotions but the second one was a refined and classical trend.

However, during work, particularly on the left hand of the Builder, I recalled Elie Faure's words about the Bedouin when he said that the work should come out in an ideal and spiritual way. Although the rock material was soft, the hand looked more finely worked than I wished. Yet I got away from the general idea of making. However, I made up for this shortcoming, to some extent, in the making of the right hand in which I tried to embody power and sexual strength. I wanted it to represent the physical power only — endurance, patience and running sweat. How can I avoid the beauty, the delicate lines and sexual appeal in figuring out the young apprentices. Even when I was busy working, I saw them with their tanned faces which were covered with a film of plaster while they were working ceaseless at the building neighbouring the Institute, (Anwar Al-Fan Night Club). Those were the apprentices, the future master builders, with their red lips and deep-black and large eyes. There were also on the other hand labourers of old men who could only carry loads and do some simple chores.

Like the ancient Assyrian artist, I tried to embody the idea in the piece of work by bringing every character to perfection, giving it the decoration and subtlety it required, The Assyrian artist, for example, used to give much more attention to the king's muscles and decoration of clothes than to the vizier's. While the prisoner was reduced to mere simple lines in his work.

But, in this piece of work, I did not give more attention to the senior apprentice than the labourers who carried dust because the latter was fortunate in relation to the others. To show the master builder finely-worked and the others less subtle with thin lines and rough surfaces would bring me closer to reality. I think any piece of art should be set up according to subject. For example, a statue representing sexual lust should not be done in the same way as a statue representing religious sacredness. Finally, I think if I spent a longer time working on it, it would appear much better. Someday I will see all its defects.

This was the first work of art I loved and admired. It was also admired by everyone who saw it. But the best congratulation and the most genuine praise I received in my life was when the builders and labourers working by the Institute expressed their admiration at the statue and everyone of them came to recognize himself in it.

A picture I drew of Hussein, an office boy, gave me a serious idea, that is I cannot be a painter. This is because I see something while my brush does something else. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot see colours as properly as it is required by a first-class painter, and I do not want to be a mediocre. I think of form and size more than of colours. There is, besides, something strange about me; that is I make most effort to give shape to the simplest pieces in sculpture while all the painting is simple to me, whether according to my old or new understanding as far as the paintings I did are concerned.

The Institute and its site are dear to me. It has influenced my career and I shall not forget that all my life. I spent four years there during which I saw everything: love and work. Now, when I leave Baghdad for Europe once more, this institution will be moved to another site which is good for nothing. If my journey proved unsuccessful, I will be very unfortunate. The new place is no good to me or to my students. It is a house without garden, without that secluded and beautiful passage and without that room and that space in front of it where I used to paint.

Translated by Adnan Salman

The World's Oldest Library

Walid Al-Jadir, Ph.D.

General view of the Library's site

The oldest library in history with more than 2000 cuneiform-inscribed clay tablets was recently found in Sippar, Babylon, 40 kilometres south-west of Baghdad.

The library which dates back to 2000 years B.C. has all the technical archaeological characteristics of ancient libraries, something not known before.

The Archaeology Department at the University of Baghdad, in cooperation with the Archaeology Authority discovered the library in the main temple of the historical city of Sippar.

After two days of careful work, the excavation team, working since 1978, found signs of neatly organised bricks. In between the bricks, the team discovered clay tablets, lined side by side vertically. Later on, after cleaning the wall facing the entrance and the one in front of it, signs of organised racks were becoming apparent.

The racks were built in oblong shapes of mud and reed, the higher part was given an arch shape. The entrance to the library is 1.80 metres wide while the large hall leading to the library is 10.5 x 5.5 sq.m in area. The floor at most of its parts was unearthed about a century ago, the size of the only remaining paved part is one square metre.

The library which is 4.20 metres long, 2.70 metres wide and 1.20 metres high is being studied and maintained by archaeologists.

The material used in constructing the library is made of clay bricks while the floor is paved with asphalt-coated bricks. Its inside walls have been divided into wood-supported gypsum. Each rack takes the shape of half circular curve framed with clay and reed.

The 56 racks hold 2,000 clay tablets which are expected to increase as archaeologists start to dig deeper and deeper. Some 100 clay tablets already recovered from the ancient temple of the city are found well organised in their original places. They are so big that each tablet is about 20 centimetres long.

The tablets are finely inscribed with small cuneiform signs in Sumerian and Akkadian languages which preceded cuneiform writing. The writings indicate that the tablets were written by a skilled scribe.

Topic of these tablets which are thought to be organised according to the content tell the stories and history of the Sumerian and Akkadian civilisations. Besides, there are pure scientific tablets on language,

mathematics, religion, geography and references.

Some of the tablets have clear dates on them like those from the reign of the Babylonian King Abad-Apla-Iddina (1067-1046 B.C.), son of Ezakil Shadun. During his reign, important events took place in Iraq such as the migration of the Aramaic group from the central western parts of the Euphrates to the middle and southern parts of Iraq. Other tablets contain a variety of subjects such as astronomy, lexicography and astronomy.

The library is considered to be the oldest ever known as no other similar one was discovered before. Although a number of clay tablets were discovered at the same area by Hormuz Rassam[1] and Vincan Scheil [2] about a century ago, none of them referred to a library or even a room with organised racks and tablets. All they had found were mere tablets containing educational and scientific subjects.

In Nineveh, Henri Layard[3] found a large number of tablets containing important encyclopaedic information. The collection of such information was carried out during King Ashur Banipal's time (668-626 B.C.) It seems that they were originally organised according to a highly scientific system. But the archaeologists never found its architectural form.

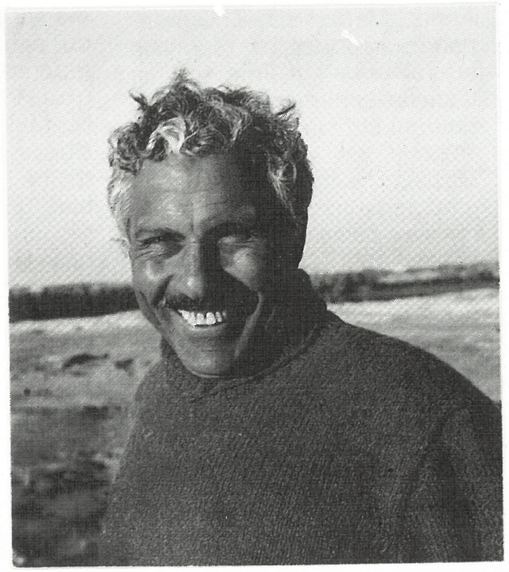
In Nefer (Nippur) large numbers of tablets containing detailed subjects on philosophy and science were found. They were neatly indexed. An indexation tablet which was found there is kept now at the Pennsylvania University Museum numbered 160/15-29. In 1890, 1892, 1896 and 1899 archaeological expeditions found and took tablets of such kind from Nefer, the great ancient city known for its Sumerian culture and civilisation.

It was Samuel Kramer[4] who first identified the tablet in Pennsylvania along with the tablet number AO 5393 at the Louvre which also turned out to be an index tablet which was copied by De Jenoyak[5]. The two index tablets included 87 titles of Sumerian literary works.

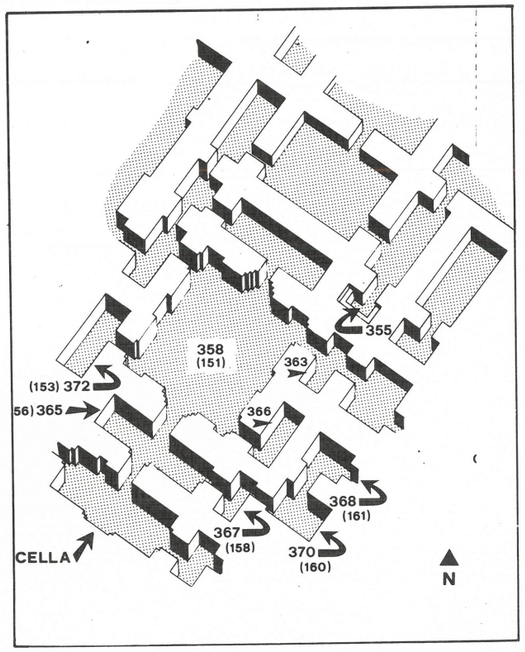
Meanwhile excavations in the temples revealed a number of halls and rooms that belong to the temple of Shamash. The temple, covering an area of more than 60 x 60 sq.m., was revealed during the final eight season of excavations (1985-86). Some of the revealed halls cover an area of more than 15 x 7 sq.m. Most of the floors are paved with bricks covered with tar. The walls are 3 metres thick, some of them are carefully ornamented from inside with black and white colours.

The architectural features of the temples are of resemblance to the ones seen in temples that belong to the neo-Babylonian age, such as the Na-bu Shikhari temple in Babylon.

An open yard decorated with buttresses and recess was also discovered. Its main entrances leading to the three surrounding halls are decorated with architectural stalactites painted in black and white



Dr. Walid al-Jadir, a Baghdad University Professor and the man who discovered the Sippar Library.



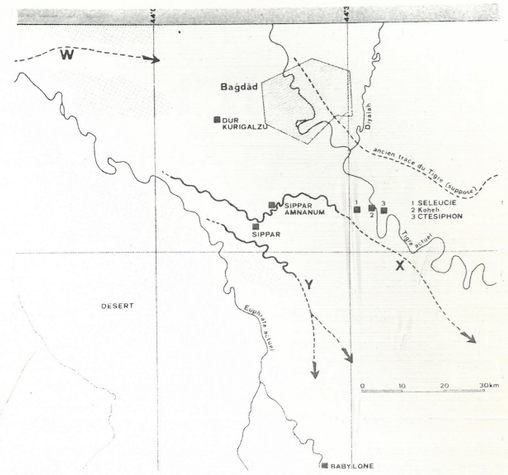
A plan showing the temple of Sippar. Room 355 is the site of the library

also familiar to the building of the neo-Babylonian period. The buttresses and recesses were repeatedly plastered with gypsum as a sign of renewal and maintenance. It seems that maintenance work was already established during the neo-Babylonian period.

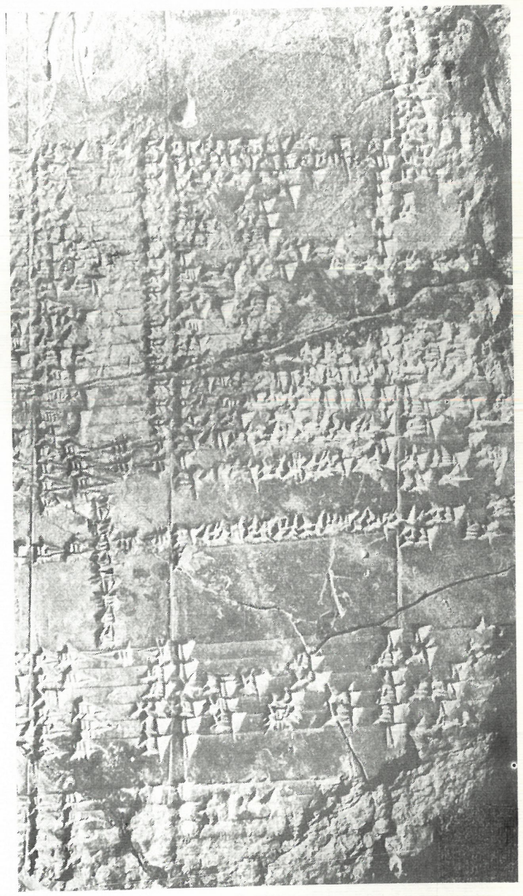
Sippar which had been ruled by the Akkadians, Sumerians and Babylonians, 2900 B.C. down to the last Babylonian King Nabunidus is one of the five recorded cities in the pre-deluge era.

The historical city of Sippar covers an area of 96 hectares and surrounded by a 1,200 metre long wall. It is divided into the religious area which accommodates the main temple and the royal palace and the area inhabited by the people.

The city flourished during the rule of the Babylonian King Hammurabi (c.1792-1750 B.C.) and his son Samsuiluna (c.1749-1712 B.C.) It also prospered under Nebuchadnezzar II (c.630-562 B.C.) King of Babylon (605-562 B.C.) and his son Nabunidus.



A map showing the location of Sippar between Baghdad and Babylon.



Some of the clay-tablets found at the library

Footnotes

1. H. Rassam, was interested in excavating in archaeological sites in Iraq. He studied at Oxford, England (1849-1852). He collected archaeological finds for the British Museum. In 1897 he published a detailed book in English about his efforts in this field *Ashur and the Land of Nimrud* New York, Easton & Mains.
2. V. Scheil, a French priest specialised in cuneiform writing. He worked at various archaeological sites in Iraq and Iran. It was he who discovered Hammurabi's stella which was transferred by the Elamites from Sippar to their capital Susa. He published a book in French about his excavations in Sippar. It included only some of his works in this ancient city. Scheil, V., *Une Saison de Fouilles a Sippar (Abu Habba),* Le Caire, 1894
3. H. Layard, a British adventurer who was in 1840 looking for work in the East and in 1845 worked as an excavator. During five years of work he achieved great archaeological discoveries especially in Assyrian sites. His most important book is *Nineveh and Its Remains.* It is also regarded as one of the important sources on Assyrian archaeology.
4. His book *Tablets from Sumer* translated by Taha Baqer.
5. French specialist in cuneiform writing and archaeological excavations. The most important excavations he carried out was at Tello.

Fiction in Iraq Between the Two World Wars

The First Period 1921-1927

Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Ph.D.

A study of modern Iraqi fiction between the years 1921 and 1927, to which it is referred to here as the first part of the 1920s, would show new factors left their marks on defining the nature and development of fiction. Some of these factors came as a direct result of the World War I while the others resulted indirectly from the changes which took place after the war. In both cases, however, such factors were a new element compared to the situation before the war. Iraqi fiction in this period took a new form which could be distinguished from primitive attempts made in writing fiction in an earlier stage. These attempts were closer to articles of a reformist and social nature than to any form of fiction.

The most significant factor which left its effect on the development of fiction in Iraq was the British military occupation of the country.[1] Many changes were introduced in the social and political life and left their impact on every aspect of life. One consequence of that occupation was that Iraq was influenced directly by Western civilisation. Before the occupation the impact of Western civilisation was indirect due to Iraq's geographical position. It came mostly through Turkey because Iraq with its three Velayats remained firmly linked with the Ottoman Empire until the British occupation. The second channel through which such an impact reached Iraq indirectly was through the neighbouring Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria and Lebanon which were ahead of Iraq in this respect. Iraq's cultural ties with these countries strengthened by the end of the nineteenth century. The third source of Western influence on Iraq came at the hands of the missionaries and foreigners who came to Iraq for various reasons.

The British forces of occupation brought with them many phenomena of the advanced Western civilisation. The Iraqis who were still in the grip of centuries of backwardness were stunned. The direct outcome of that was that scores of them hastened to copy the Westerners in their costumes, eating manners, frivolity and indolence. The younger generations were overwhelmed by the "Westernization" craze. Many dedicated people became worried by such trends and warned of the consequences of this kind of blindfolded mimicking of the glittering but phoney phenomena of Western civilisation while neglecting its useful and serious aspects. Such calls can be seen clearly in the various articles and stories published in that period. Among this kind of works there was an educational but naive novel entitled "The Wonders of the Time in the Citadel of the Bride of Countries" written by lawyer Agop Gabriel and published in 1928.[2]

Also as a result of this occupation the Iraqis became more aware of their backwardness and their bad condition. They also became aware of the need to change this reality. This awareness was represented in the spread of nationalist feelings which started to call for independence. The 1920 uprising (known as 1920 Revolution) was the culmination of such calls.[3]

The other expression of such awareness was the great change in the cultural life in Iraq in the early 1920s. Large numbers of people started to read books and other publications. There was an increase in the number of writers and authors. During this period Iraq was the scene of an active scientific and cultural movement. This movement strengthened and was given prominence by the increase in the number of printing and publishing houses and bookshops which undertook publishing books and newspapers. In addition, the low cost of printing and paper contributed to this great interest people took in reading.

This active literary movement, however, did not bring about writers and men of letters of any significance in the history of modern literature in Iraq because most of them lacked a solid cultural background. Furthermore the general factors which contributed to the development of society in general were

not mature enough then to advance the cause of intellectual movement. Minds were preoccupied with political issues because of circumstances besetting Iraq at that time.

Another factor in this respect was the nature of modern thought and literature which began to spread in Iraq after the First World War at a regular pace. A number of commercial bookshops were established in Iraq then such as McKenzie and al-Assriya bookshops which played an important part in providing the market with samples of foreign literary works. Most of these works were of little or no significance and came from Egypt in the form of novels translated into Arabic or written originally in Arabic in the same manner as foreign novels and were aimed at entertaining the reader. The other part of these works were of a moral, social or political nature taken from Western books. Some of them were good and useful while the rest had no real value.

Modern Iraqi literature was characterized in this period by this kind of thought and literary work. Iraq, therefore, followed intellectually the Egyptian example for a long time. This dependency, however, did not cover all aspects of arts and literature. It was rather confined to the genre of prose alone. Even poetry remained immune of such effects because it was deep-rooted in Iraq.

(2)

It was natural, therefore, that during this period of the 1920, the Iraqi writers' perception of fiction was determined by the type of novels and fiction which were published in Egypt particularly and by which the Iraqi market was inundated. These novels and fictions followed two main patterns. In the first category, the novels were based on a love affair between two idealistic lovers. Many obstacles would hinder their reunion but they would meet eventually. The events would be so complicated and numerous that the reader would fail in most instances to follow them. Or the love story would have a tragic end similar to that of Camille (La Dame aux Camelias) by Alexandre Dumas (fils) or (the Sorrows of Young Werther) by the German poet Geothe. The publication of the Arabic translation of these two novels in the Arab world had a great impact on the pattern followed by Arabic novel and resulted in changing its traditional happy ending. Thus the tragic end became a characteristic of Arabic novel after the World War I. The other common novels then were the historical novel of Jorgi Zeidan and other historical and detective stories which were characterized by adventures, exaggeration and wild imagination.

The second pattern of these novels can be found in the novels written by Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti and Jibran Khalil Jibran. Their style was one of oration and loaded with sentiments and emotion. Al-Manfaluti's writings were in general based on describing Platonic love with a great exaggeration on chastity

The pioneer story-writer al-Sayyid

and self-denial. Jibran's writings on the other hand were characterized by a poetic style saturated with sanctifying love and the heavenly feelings and unbearable sufferings it brings to the spirit.

The spread of these two types of novels among Iraqi readers was mainly due to the fact that the readers were semi-educated and most of them did not have an adequate level of learning which would help them dissect serious and deep writings and novels. This shortcoming in education was a result of the educational policy adopted by the British colonialists whereby attention was paid only to primary education at the expense of university and higher education. There were other factors which contributed in the spread of these types of novels. Among them was the feeling of disappointment and frustration which prevailed in the country after the failure of the 1920 Revolution and the social shocks brought about by the change in civilization. Moreover, most intellectuals failed to have a decent love affair which would end in a natural way as a result of the circumstances in their environment and the strict traditions which consider a woman anything but her real self. All these factors made the new generation of readers resort to reading to forget these sufferings and harsh reality.

These novels were criticized by conservative men of letters because of the wrong impression they gave and their widespread circulation among the readers. As a result the development of Iraqi fictions was hindered[4] and this wrong impression about the novel prevailed for a long time during the 1920s. The consequent confusion and generalization that followed meant that every work with some amount of fiction and dialogue was called novel regardless of whether it

met the ncessary artistic requirements or not.

(3)

Under these circumstances, it was natural for the young writers who were fascinated by this art to imitate this pattern of writing and novels. The pioneering attempts by Mahmoud Ahmed al-Sayyid in this respect can be considered the beginnings of fiction writing in Iraq in that period. He published his first novel entitled "For the Sake of Marriage" in 1921. He described it as a social love story. In 1922 he published his novel entitled "The Destiny of the Weak" which he described in the same way. This was followed by a collection of short stories called "Disasters" which he described as short novels.

Al-Zanbaqa magazine whose first issue came out in 1922 published a serialized novel of the same character and it was called "Mistress of Baghdad." The magazine described the novel as a "social and reformist novel in which the modern girl is shown in her real appearance and the necessary politeness and well-behaviour."

Sami Khonda wrote a similar love story called "Selma and Nadeem." He described it with the familiar words as "a social, love story and work of art." It was published in al-Istiqlal newspaper.

The impact of adventure and love stories prevailing in the Arab world in that period can be easily traced in such early attempts. Apart from trying to imitate such novels and using the same expressions these early attempts in fiction writing in Iraq by young writers adopted even the same long format of such novels. They did not start with writing short stories. This trend, however, did not continue for a long time. Iraqi writers would soon and for a long time to come switch to writing short stories. Even the novels which they wrote were short and limited and written within a large span of time by writers motivated by personal incentives as we shall see in other sections of this study.[5] In fact the year 1921 in which Mahmoud Ahmed al-Sayyid wrote his first novel "For the Sake of Marriage" can be considered as the real beginning of modern fiction in Iraq. Marking the beginning of modern Iraqi fiction with the publication of this novel does not mean that it had an exceptional value. It was rather a naieve narrative lacking any artistic value. The writer soon recognized its shortcomings after its publication and at a later stage when he became more mature, he dissociated himself from it.

However the novel marks the beginning of fiction in Iraq because it was the first novel or story ever to be written in Iraq. In writing, the writer was prompted by his awareness of the importance of modern fiction and introducing it into Iraqi literature despite all difficulties and sarcasm with which he was received especially at a time when he was the only one to think of such an attempt. His determination to pursue writing despite all the obstacles made him indeed the pioneer of modern fiction in Iraq. He published his second novel entitled "The Destiny of Weak" and his collection entitled "Disasters" in 1922. His writings can be considered in fact as samples that represent the nature of Iraqi fiction in that period. There is not any other work which surpasses his writings or even comes close to it, despite their technical weaknesses. Therefore his stories enjoy a great historical value. [6]

(4)

A reader of al-Sayyid's stories at this stage of his life which can also be considered the first stage in his literary career can see easily how much he was influenced by the two prevailing trends in writing fiction in that period. One can also realize easily that his writings then were those of a beginner who had not mastered yet the requirements of writing i.e., the language, the idea, and art he needed. He was a writer who tried to tread new grounds and break into the arena of a new art prompted by strong ambition but without anyone to share it with him.

His first novel, "For the Sake of Marriage" is a love story between two idealist lovers who face a great deal of difficulties as it was the case with other similar novels in that time.

The naivety of this novel, its bad style and language which is full of grammatical and spelling mistakes would shock the reader.

The novel is also loaded with adventure, events which take place in a foreign country, namely India. It also describes the conflict between good and bad, stereotyped heroes. There are a great deal of advice, instructions and speeches which the writer makes through the characters of his novel. It is also characterized by the frequent interference on the part of the writer in the novel's course of events and with poetry recitation, a style which was common in narrating Arabic folk tales. There is also a great deal of quotations from several books and frequent references to them. Another characteristic of this novel is its reformist and didactic tendency which tries to use every opportunity to declare itself.

There was no great change in his second novel called "The Destiny of the Weak," despite the fact that he tried to avoid repeating some obvious shortcomings which occurred in his first work when he discovered them as he said.

Studying his short story collection entitled "The Disasters" which he described as "short novels" would show that they have nothing in common with short story except for their small number of pages. They are in fact a number of abridged long stories. One of them is a summarized version of his novel "For the Sake of Marriage" in which the writer tried to overcome its first confused structure which made him the target of a great deal of criticism. These stories were a kind of social talks closer to articles than anything else. They were presented in the form of story in a dry documentary style concluded with advice, preaching and moral lessons. He quoted repeatedly from the books or cited examples from poetry to explain what he wanted to say.

These stories, no matter how they are viewed, were characterized by a spirit of dejection and despair. This might have been an expression of disappointment and frustration with which the new generation in Iraq was overcome as a result of the political events which led their country away from what they were hoping. The protagonist of these stories, therefore was mostly an outsider dissatified with society and its unfair rules. In his life he would behave in an idealistic and honest way which was uncomprehensible by his fellow citizens.

In the story entitled "Champions of Wine" the protagonist is a monster beset by failure and defeat. In "Two Lines from a Tale" he believes progress in life is a matter of luck and it has nothing to do with hard work. In "The Story of the Weak" he raises his voice in complaint but because he is weak nobody would listen to him. In "The Preacher" he tries to reform people's condition, therefore the delivers reformist speeches on various occasions which are in fact about childhood and adolescence.

This collection of short stories shows in a definite way that al-Sayyid was not familiar then with the artistic structure of short story nor were other story-writers who actually wrote stories in that period. This is the underlying factor behind the confusion apparent in the structure of these stories which made some of them closer to a social article lacking any artistic value.

(5)

One can, therefore, say positively that short story which is the main kind of fiction practised by Iraqi writers remained stumbling in the early years of the 1920s. There was not a single writer in this period who succeeded to write a short story enjoying the minimum requirements of a real short story. There were many reasons behind this fact. In the forefront of such reasons was the social reality in Iraq then which was not mature enough to allow a group of intellectuals have a deep insight into that reality so that they could express it in a manner which would reveal some aspects of such reality.

Another reason lies in the traditional distaste on the part of great writers and men of letters towards fiction. This attitude was worsened by their conservative cultural background and aversion to write in this field. Thus the burden of writing in this field was shouldered by members of the young generation who at their best were beginners. Their educational and cultural background would not exceed that of secondary school students. Therefore their attempts in writing fiction were similar to those practised by such students in writing and composition lessons. Such writings were characterized by poor expression, weak phrases and lack of skill.

The situation was worsened by the nature of the samples which they imitated and to which a reference has been made earlier in this study. All such samples lacked any artistic value and were aimed at entertaining and pandering the laymen's taste. Iraqi fiction was a mere imitation of Egyptian fiction. Up to then there had not appeared any good Egyptian fiction which would attract people. On the other hand there was not any trace of influence of the Turkish fiction on Iraqi fiction, despite the strong ties between Iraq and Turkey and the mastering of Turkish language by many Iraqis.

The Iraqi press for its part had a negative impact in that period. Papers were politicized and influenced by wishes and moods. Iraqi papers despite their interest in publishing short stories could not present any types of stories except for the kinds common in those days. This was due to the limited cultural background of their editors and because most of their pages were devoted to political issues. On the contrary these helped deepen the confusion concerning the definition of fiction. These papers embarked on translating love stories related to well-known political and historical figures and publishing interesting news items which were presented as stories or novels as these papers often described them.

The situation in the early years of the 1920s shows that stories written in that period were very modest both in terms of quality and quantity. There were only a few people engaged in writing fiction.

It can be said, therefore, that the emergence of the genre of fiction which possesses all or at least some of the necessary requirements of this art was delayed to until the late 1920s. A number of factors held out new prospects characterized by artistic features. These factors and the new reality of Iraqi fiction will be dealt with in the third part of this study.

Translated by Hadi al-Taie

(1) The British forces first landed at Fao on November 6, 1914. However, the actual occupation of Iraq took place only after a long period in which the British forces of occupation suffered heavy casualties and losses at the hands of Turks and Arabs who put up a fierce resistance. Baghdad was occupied in 1917.

(2) It is a didactic novel in which the writer tried to explain the Western social systems. He hoped that his countrymen could benefit of them and throw away the artificial aspects of such systems which they copied and considered as real characteristics of Western civilisation. Apart from its first pages, the novel is a social research which takes the form of a novel. It is a dialogue between two persons through which the writer says his opinions. The novel talks about "The Bride of the Orient", a reference made by the writer to Iraq. Its introduction is taken from one of 'dream-stories' known as "Pause Over the River Diala or a Talk with Venus." Except for its weak style and complicated phrases there was nothing new in this introduction as related to that story.

(3) This Revolution broke out on June 30, 1920 and despite its failure it was the main factor which made Britain to establish the modern Iraqi state as it is known.

(4) Perhaps the most striking example in this respect is the attitude taken by al-Amal newspaper published by the poet Ma'rouf al-Rusafi. It considered these novels an obstacle in the way of renaissance and a cause behind killing its spirit. See an article entitled "Our scientific and Literary Life." No. 30, Vol.1, November 5, 1923.

(5) For a complete list of Iraqi stories published in the first part of the 1920s see "An Index of Iraqi Story" by the writer. The titles of these stories and places where they were published are listed in that book. Among the first short stories discovered by the writer was one entitled "The Martyr of Homeland and the Martyr of Love" by Murad Mikhael. It was published in al-Mufeed newspaper in 1922. Another short story from that period was entitled "The Deceived" published by al-Nashia al-Jadid newspaper at the end of that year without referring to its writer.

(6) Al-Sayyid described his suffering because of his first attempt in writing fiction on many occasions. There is a reference to this in the introduction of a story he wrote under the title "The Destiny of the Weak" and in a book he wrote together with Awni Bakir Sidqi under the title "The Opposing Lances" and in the introduction of his short story, "The Disasters."

In the introduction of "The Destiny of the Weak" he said: "I have been longing to write fiction for a long time but I was hesitant because of the difficulties involved. I sought advice from this and that. I could not find anyone who encourage me in my pursuit. Everybody advised me to abandon the matter and forget about it because they belittled my ability and thought I would not be able to do the job. They believed mistakenly that writing fiction was a great job and beyond the ability of an Iraqi writer as if the fiction writers of other nations had descended from heaven. I did not pay much attention to that and I wrote my first novel "For the Sake of Marriage."

However, it became obvious later that it was incomplete in various aspects. Some people disregarded it while others did not receive it well. All these did not affect my enthusiasm. I said I better try to correct the matter. I would go on writing until I succeed. This is my second novel to my Iraqi countrymen. I hope it is better than the first one."

The following is a 'short story' by Mahmoud Ahmed al-Sayyid from his collection "Disasters" which was first published in 1922 by al-Asriya Bookshop and printed in Egypt. It serves as a good example of the short stories written in Iraq in the period between the two World Wars.

The Preacher

Mahmoud Ahmed al- Sayyid

This zealous preacher is one of those eccentric young people tribulated by their sharp intelligence and over-sensitivity. If you happen to meet his match in a country of the East, you would better not ask about him even if you felt you had to.

Don't be puzzled by what is said about him and the stories of him going mad or falling victim to a chronic disease or his sudden death or tragic suicide.

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Once I heard him addressing a group of people in a gathering and saying:

"If we look at the majority of our people we will find out that they all are after progress, promotion, getting rich and living a happy life. But which one of them is really and sincerely trying to achieve this aim?

Look at these cafes, places of deprivation and dissolution, bars and wineshops. They are all packed with men and people of every class. Everyone of them has forgotten himself and his wishes and golden dreams. How can they, in this condition, achieve any progress and perfection and get rich and obtain money or live their lives to the full?

Are these places factories? or shops? or places of science?

Life is an honest word. It has a meaning. If man knew this word properly, he would have worked hard and diligently to attain his aim and his long-cherished aim."

I listened to this speech by that young man as did others. I said here was a new preacher sermonizing the people and I hope they would listen to him.

After a while I read the following article which he published in the newspaper:

"Between the Meadows of Seriousness and Jest."

They said the East will be as the West. But when this would happen?

They said the East is a follower of the West. But why does it follow the West in trivial things and does not follow it in important things?

They said the East copies the West. But why does it copy the West upside down? The Westerners are rising and we are descending. They are serious and we are fantastic. They are mature men and we are naive boys. And still we say: We shall be the same as the westerners.

Our old people are dead before their actual death. Our elders are asleep day and night. They are in an unconscious state. With our young people the calamity will be much harder when they wake up to the reality.

They claim they have become as Westerners but they are wrong in their claim. They have not copied the Westerners' manners, sciences philosophy or arts. Nor have they copied them in their manhood or in their good taste.

I say "taste" and turn to our friends to see whether they have understood what I meant by this word.

To be honest, even the only virtue they claim, they are far from it.

What they aim at or what they know about taste is to appear before the people in new fashionable clothes and a strange appearance and unusual mannerism which they call taste or "fashion" as they say.

If fashion could talk, it would shout at the top of its voice: leave me alone, you do not know me well. You may make your hair style as the Spaniards do, wear neck tie as the French do. You might even wear a German jacket and American troursers. Your shoes may be like those of young girls and your stick like that of a tourist and you may walk in an affected way. But what you come up with would be a mixture that is alien to Westerners and might even repel higher classes in the Sudan.

What is ridiculously funny is that the two-winged tie which is worn in Europe by people engaged in arts has become the fashion over here among empty-headed people.

I don't know what those people, I mean musicians, painters, actors and the like would say if they knew it has become toy in the hands of yongsters.

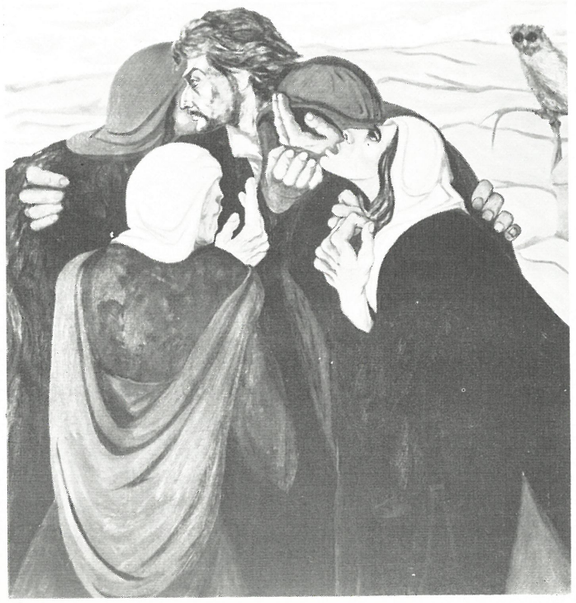
Is this how we claim and say we are copying the Westerners?"

I read this article as did others and I said it is another preacher sermonizing the people. I wish they would listen to him.

After a long time I read this article written by him in the newspaper:

"'A word on Marriage'

The great freedom presses me to say publicly what I see in the interests of the nation although it might contradicts some faulty opinions and rotten customs which are the underlying cause of our troubles.



Mohammed Arif, Return of the Cavalier, oil, 100x130

Some writers have started to assume a vital and useful task, that is to discuss the role of marriage on the pages of the capital's newspapers. They have tried in their writings to underline the reasons which hinder its spread in our country and to discover the original causes which have left it so pathetic. I believe, however, that they won't succeed in reaching their goal.

They might have known it but they don't disclose it to avoid the indignation of the public opinion or because of other reasons.

There are many issues which sometimes hinder the concluding of marriage as it is desired. There are, however, other factors which undoubtedly represent the first stumbling block obstructing the marriage of young cultured people of noble ideas and sound mind.

Take for example the absence of any acquaintance between the husband and wife and denying the woman any freedom to reject the man whom she does not like or to declare her real choice and other things.

Most of those who are forced by these forcible customs to lose these important rights prefer to remain bachelor especially when they see the terrible consequences arising from such uneven marriages such as the disharmony between the husband and wife. These consequences are the real cause of misery among families and the quarrels which lead to fighting and murder or result in the frequent cases of divorce and other things.

There is no alternative but to give woman the necessary freedom so that marriage can be concluded in the proper way, otherwise we shall have no way out of this big predicament."

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I read this article as did others and for the third time I said another preacher sermonizing the people. I wish they would listen. But alas! I wish he would not write and would not advise, not because the people are deaf, dumb and blind but because they heard what he said. After the first talk they laughed at him. A son of a newly civilised rich man insulted him in revenge of his second sarcastic article. And the riffraffs and the mob assaulted him because of the third article.

You zealous young man!

Get up! break the pen and throw away the blackened paper.

Then revolt, revolt, revolt. You are still in this environment, you will remain among the people of this environment.

You were hoping to become a preaching writer among them to benefit them. As soon as they heard the echo of your writings they rose to smash you and to prepare a meal from your flesh and blood to present it to the statue of the hungry humanity.

Revolt, revolt, revolt, you are still in this environment and you will remain among the peple of this environment. They have laughed at you enough yesterday. They should not laugh any more in this new day.

Revolt, revolt, revolt. You are still in this environment and you will remain among the people of this environment.

Translated by Hadi al-Taie

Man and Nature in Daghestani's Photos

Najman Yaseen

Murad Daghestani was born in Mosul in 1917. He started working in photography in 1935. He took part in more than ninety international photo exhibitions and his photographs appeared in many world reviews. He won several medals and certificates of appreciation from different countries, including Germany, France, Yugoslavia, China and Brazil. In November 1975 he was honoured by the President of the Republic.

Daghestani died on July 27, 1982 after suffering from cancer for many years.

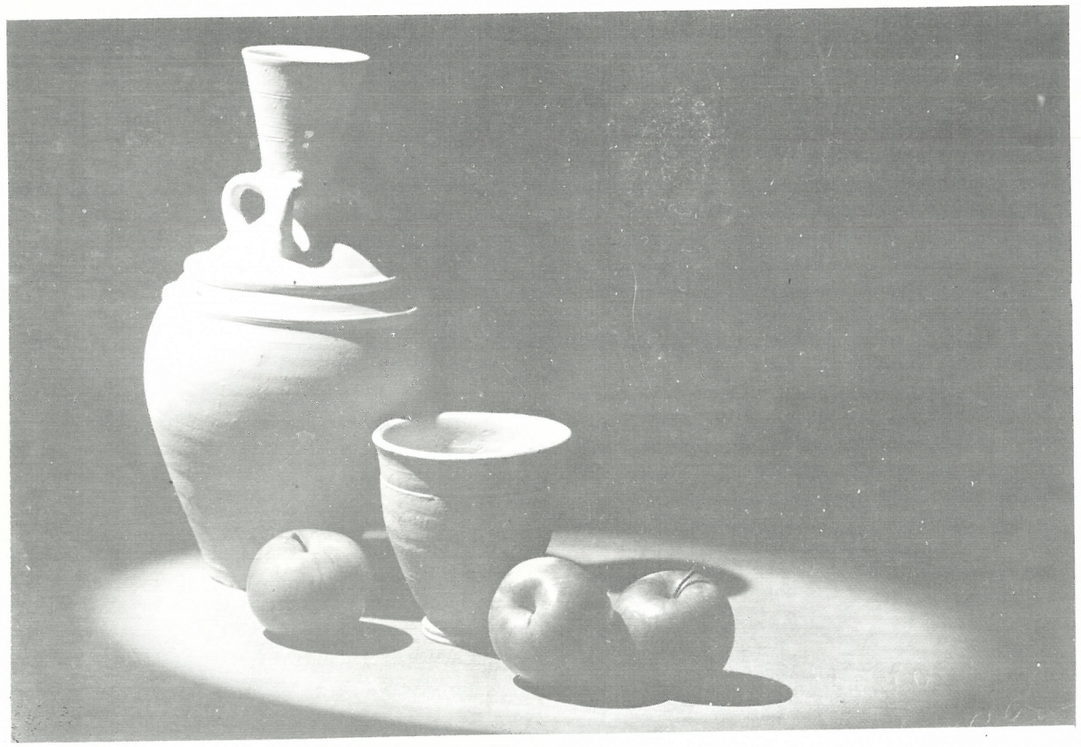
It is generally agreed that Daghestani was a pioneer of modern Iraqi photography. His photographs possess creative qualities, which bring them near to painting, although Daghestani always insisted that photography is a skill not an art. He was simply an artist haunted by curiosity and creativity.

More than forty years ago a young photographer, who was to become one of the best-known artists in the Arab World, photographed a skull surrounded by a handful of coins and bank-notes. The picture upset the town where he lived and infuriated the bourgeoisie, who boycotted him because they were not amused by the idea. The young artist, however, did not lose faith in what he believed. He continued his creative course, his only capital being the love and appreciation shown to him by the poor. He was confident that originality meant that one should be true to oneself and sincere to others.

It is not easy to write about a great artist like Murad Daghestani: to write interestingly about a genius one needs to have some of the inspiration of the genius. Daghestani was a versatile person. The serious photographer who selected a skull surrounded by a few coins and bank-notes to be the theme of one of his shots was also an adventurer who loved to enjoy life as much as he could. He would return home after midnight in a carriage drawn by two horses often at that late hour he would watch the carriage driver and the horses and listen to the rain pouring down on a frosty night. Then an idea would suddenly cross his mind. Rising slowly from his place in the carriage, he would push a half-dinar in the driver's hand, sit in the driving seat and firmly get hold of the two leather straps by means of which the driver's wishes and whims are passed to the horses. Being now the master of the carriage, the young man would send his orders to the horses, they would sometimes go slowly and then run dangerously fast, their master dreaming of other worlds. He would watch the hoofs hitting against the hard surface of the street with occasional sparks flying off in the dark winter night. He would not use the whip, not even once; he aimed at first hand experience and wanted to photograph the horses.

This brief note is hardly an adequate introduction to the vast world of the great artist. Daghestani began his career in 1940s with a simple primitive camera. However, he had the gifts of an artist and the inspiration of a genius, which enabled him to take some brilliant shots. These pictures show the artist as a rebel; he refused to be ruled by what was fashionable or popular.

Compared with drawing and painting, photography has a relatively short history. It began after the industrial revoluton. Daghestani found himself cultivating a relatively virgin land. He aimed at making photography a universal language capable of expressing things in a precise way. He used for this universal language familiar themes which represented various aspects of human life.



Photography is both an acquired skill, associated with technology (one must know about the lens, the filter, etc.) — and a creative art requiring natural gifts. A good photographer must possess both, so that he will be able to go beyond the mere act of 'taking pictures'. Long experience and professional knowledge are also essential. A glance at Daghestani's photographs reveals that he had plenty of gift and skill. A closer look however shows that the clue to his creativeness lies in the fact that whatever is produced by the artist has its origin in personal experience and true feelings. Every good work of art is the product of contentment: a harmony between the internal attitude of the artist and the outside world. This can be achieved only as a result of profound experience and patience.

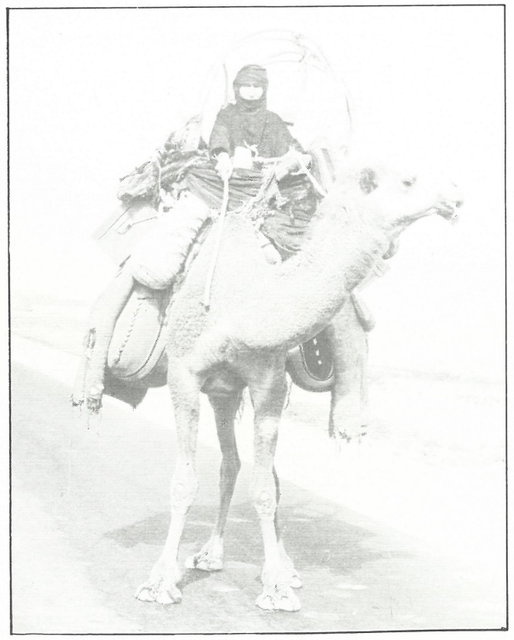
For Daghestani the prime motive is love, love of the land, the poor and the wretched; love of Nature and man. He paid dearly for his devotion to this type of love. He worked hard and paid little attention to his physical health; all that mattered for him was his work; he spent long arduous hours aiming at improving his art. Finally his heath gave way. Later in his life the artist seemed to have regretted this: "In the past I loved photography very much ... not now. Sometimes I wish I had not chosen to become a photographer. "In the past I worked like a madman." . This attitude was probably due to his illness; he was afraid that he would wake up one morning and find that the things had slipped off his fingers like drops of water. "In spite of my illness I don't think I'll die soon. But I also know that I'll not live long." Did Daghestani's long illness succeed in damping his devotion to originality and creativity? Certainly not. He continued to carry his camera and chase the prettiest and the most unusual things. "If I live another two years I'd achieve something important I have been dreaming of but have not been able to achieve in the past ... only two years and I'd realize a big dream I've recently become aware of."

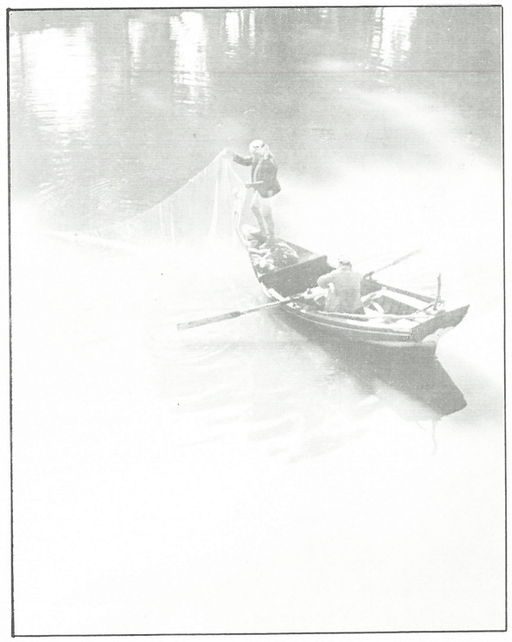
Before entering the world of Daghestani, one must say something about the photographer's use of the camera and the way he selected his shots. He prefers the strange and the unusual and refuses to be a slave of tradition and routine. "I don't follow any fixed rule in taking my shots. I nearly always prefer to use my camera in the early morning when things are fresh filled with the new breaths of life. I don't care much about the recognized rules of photography. My camera is ready even if the object is not in the right focus. Following the rule may result in a person becoming a

slave of the rule — he may stagnate." The photographer is a painter who uses light instead of paint to bring out the whispering tones and beats in his pictures. Daghestani is the master of a technique which exploits light skilfully. "By decreasing or increasing light more than usual a photographer may obtain unusual shots which we admire." Daghestani achieves this at two levels: with the camera when he takes the shot, and while developing it by choosing the proper material "I choose the proper material for the negative. Before magnifying the picture, I usually obtain a number of medium size copies. Then I think of the parts which must go before I settle on the final version. The final decision is naturally mine, but I consult a number of artists and persons with artistic background before I take my decision and apply the finishing touches. This would often involve changing the processing material and other things." Here too we are face to face with skill and creativity combined in Daghestani's art.

The General Characteristics of Daghestani's World

One of the characteristics of Daghestani's work is his hypersensitive ability to choose the right angle in an attempt to obtain an unusual and exciting shot. This tendency in the artist is seen at its best in the way he deals with human beings. His people are the underprivileged who live in the dark corners of big cities, away from the light of the day. They are men who struggle hard under difficult conditions and defy Nature; they want to know the secret of their existence and are like fishermen who cast their nets in the dark seas to catch the secrets of the deep. Incidently, fishermen loom large in the work of Daghestani, so do beggars, madmen and tramps. However, his favourite theme is probably the heroic and noble quality in fishermen, craftsmen, labourers and other members of the underprivileged classes. Had Daghestani been a novelist his heroes would have had much in common with Hemingway's heroes. This explains the artist's interest in showing man facing his destiny. His heroes defy both Nature and Society. These heroes have strong will power, love for life, they are always ready to fight, in spite of difficulties, ready to defy disappointment coming from inside and outside. Although Daghestani's hero is adament in resisting the cruelty of Nature, he is at the same time filled with awe for its divine power. "I feel small in the presence of Nature. The smell of the earth after a rainfall fills me with ecstasy." The photographer wants to be at one with Nature and is able to achieve this owing to his hypersensitivity. He feels intense love for the Earth and great friendship for Nature with all its gentle and violent movements — even when it stands still, he feels there is movement. "All things move through the process of growth and decay. There is movement inside the human body, there is





movement in wood, iron, in the brain, in society, there is movement in the essence of existence."

Man and the Mystery of Life

Besides his interest in social and revolutionary themes, Daghestani shows marked interest in the mystery of life and existence. Man is often seen as an outsider in this world, pouzzled by the mysterious forces of life. But he does not give way to despair and nihilism. He believes that determination and will power can do wonders.

In "Nida al-Nahr" (Call of the River) man stands in the presence of river, "a symbol of generosity and a journey into the future." He is ready to wash away from his body (and soul) the filth of the world, and purify his soul in order to renew his existence. The river is the source of life which drives away fear. The dark background acts as a foil for the bright spots which symbolize hope; the barbed wires stand for hardships. There are also vague figures of human beings, which become less distinct further towards the background; they indicate a sense of loss.

The same theme reappers in "Manfa" (Exile), where a lonely woman walks behind wires, carrying her wounds and miseries. All the same, she is determined to continue her walk. In "Amama Malakuti al-Lah" (Before the Kingdom of God), man stands before the univers — water, sky and land. He appears as a petty gain, but still a part of the universe. He is a little creature; nevertheless, he has his own existence and his presence. He does not feel weak since he is part of the movement of universe.

Nature

Nature looms large in the work of Daghestani. "To me Nature is transparent. It inspires a calm feeling in me. I want to get away from crowded places. I like rain, clear skies, land and trees. Water is the symbol of life." Here too Daghestani often concentrates on contrasts in Nature. Land is sometimes cracked and barren, and on other times fertile and green. "We'll all return to mother earth one day. Sometimes I feel as if I were walking on human bodies. The earth embraces us all eventually." This is probably the reason why in many of his pictures, Daghestani shows the earth in a mourning garment. It is not a sign of passive romanticism; on the contrary, it has many revolutionary elements in it.

Clear skies and clouds are also among the themes which interest the artist. "Lately I have been concentrating on pictures of the sky because it exceeds the earth in vastness and immenseness." The sky is there even when the artist's focus of interest is somewhere else. This tendency is seen in "Call of the River"" The same is true of clouds, which are sometimes white like cotton, and occasionally dark and gloomy. However, the general characteristic of both is that they appear in transparent and crystal shapes possessing a special shining quality. "Whenever I see a cloud I feel some impulse inside me which forces me to go out and take a shot of it."

His pictures of Nature are usually taken from a high point — a bridge or a cliff; the artist wants to dominate the things captured by his camera, but he does not neglect the proper distance. Thus the sky often appears reflected in water, it forms a continuum, "When I was a child, I used to like rain, I would go out and walk in the rain. This is why water, river and rain are seen in many pictures." Water often reflects Daghestani's joy in the presence of Nature, as in the bright, gentle curves in "Nashwa " (Ecstacy). His stream of consciousness is embodied in the ducks swimming gently with the current, a trip which has especial charm for the artist.

Rain persistently appears in Daghestani's work; it takes sometimes the form of heavy showers and sometimes it turns to gentle drizzle. "When I stand in the rain I feel a kind of joy, with drops running down my face. Then I look at the lamp posts nearby and feel at one with water. I feel a kind of ecstacy similar to that felt by a sufi." Water appears in several of Daghestani's pictures, namely "Sayyad al-Samak" (Fisherman), "Nida al-Nahr" (Call of the River) and "Jawamis" (Buffalos). In the last picture the animals appear as gentle, mythical creatures enjoying a quiet swim at noon.

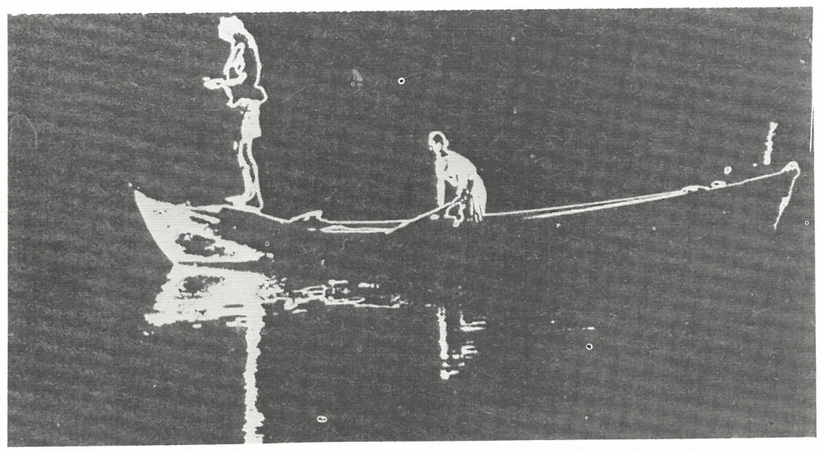
Several, of Daghestani's pictures show exquisite movement. In "Sayyad al-Samak" (Fisherman) our eyes move gently from the fisherman's feet to the cliff nearby. In "Ishraq" (Sunrise) one can almost feel the warm rays leaving the picture and travelling towards him.

Abstraction is another dimension which is found in some of Daghestani's photographs, as in "Al-Samt" (Silence) where the artist revolts against the conventional values of photography. This picture comes very near to painting; the lights and shades intermingle in it and spread in a way which makes a person feel the silence of dead town. The bare trees and sterile nature add to the effect of the picture. The trees are tall and stand upbright challenging the tempest.

Women

"A woman is a gentle transparent creature; she is like water and air, fresh and loving. She gives the man joy, even when she is sad. Imagine a stream of sorrow filling a man's heart with joy, a sad stream of love." This explains the artist's great interest in photographing women in such a way as to turn them into statues. He focuses on femininity in a woman, on her beauty which he could willingly transfer into absolute beauty. Daghestani's portraits of women reveal his burning desire to move from the relative to the absolute. Thus women sometimes appear in strange shapes, incomplete, still prisoners of reality, a long way from the universal and the absolute. It may be said that in these photograph the artist is in search of ideal or a model which he has not found yet. Often he is like a sufi trying to obtain a glimpse of revelation.

Translated by Dr. Yowel Aziz



Modern Arabic Poetry As a Literary Genre

Fadhil Thamir

The question of literary genres or kinds has always been one of the most complicated problems faced by critics and aestheticians. Since Plato and Aristotle, scholars have never ceased to examine and study this problem facing also various contemporary literary trends in various countries. Arabic literature is no exception. This is quite evident from the fruitful debate which has particularly taken place in recent years on the essence of genres in old and modern Arabic literature.

In this study, we shall try to examine the modern Arabic poem in the light of the problem of literary genres. Can we classify "free verse" as a new literary genre, as one scholar did?. Can we regard the various forms produced by modern Arabic poetry as the long poem, dramatic poem, short poem and others as independent literary genres, as some critics and scholars claim? Can we regard the traditional themes of Arabic poetry such as love, satire, boasting, panegyric and others as complete poetic genres, as some academic critics hold? Or shall we instead leave the matter of literary genres root and branch as the romanticists did when they rejected the premises of classicism, particularly the premise that literary genres are pure. Or as the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce did when he categorically rejected this theory saying, "Each poem is a literary genre in itself."

How can we tackle this problem in the light of the current cultural changes and in the first place, in the light of the development of modernism in Arabic poetry during the last decades? I shall attempt to tackle this problem historically and terminologically with the view of shaping our current critical position.

Critics and scholars have used a great number of terms to describe this problem. It seems that the French term *Genres* is the most common one. Some scholars pointed out that there are equivalent terms in German such as *Gatlungs* and in Spanish *Genros,* which have the same meaning. But this term was only recently established in English, early this century to be precise. Previously, the term 'Kinds' or'Species' were commonly used in most critical studies. Although, the term genres is common now, some scholars like Fowler, prefer to use the term 'Kinds' and some critics like Rodway prefer to use the term 'Types'.

In Arabic, the use of the two terms 'Genres' and 'Kinds' in their current critical sense is not common. It seems that this is because the matter of literary genres has not been taken seriously by Arab critics who might not have fully grasped the premise of literary genres put forth by Aristotle in his book *Poetica* (poetics). Perhaps, the inaccurate translation rendered by some old Arab translators in this respect is the reason for this.

When we look up the word "Kind" in the Arabic dictionary we will find that it means "every sort of a thing and every species of everything and it is more particular than genres" These words have certain implications but have nothing to do with the critical term in question. As for the word Genres, it also has no particular terminological indication in the Arabic dictionary and it also means "every sort of a thing." Some hold the idea that the word genres has a Greek origin.

So, we can only resort to the common meaning of the term in foreign literary criticism. According to Vinson, literary genres and kinds are "general technical formulas of certain characteristics and rules, that contain chapters or sections which, for all their variation and complexity, give form to literary production."

In the words of Austin Warren and Rene Wellek "literary genres do not classify literature and its history according to time and place, but according to the structure or organisation of special literary kinds."

Most scholars and critics concerned with the history of literary genres see that these genres did not appear all at once. The epic came first, followed by the lyric and finally drama. Some try to find an explanation for this order saying that "At the beginning, man expressed himself and his attitude towards this

world through narrative or epic. When his consciousness developed with the development of society, man expressed himself and his consciousness of this world through another literary genre, that is lyric poetry. With the development of society, man expressed himself through third literary genre, that is dramatic literature."

Hegel tried to apply his well-known three-part philosophical system to the emergence of literary genres. He holds that epic is related to the objective world while lyric poetry is related to the subjective world. Drama on the other hand, is a synthesis of the two.

Austin Warren and Rene Wellek hold that the works of Artistotle and Horace are classical reference books on the theory of genres. Plato and Aristotle, in their view, distinguish between the three major kinds according to the method of imitation: lyric poetry shows the character of the poet himself while in epic poetry the poet talks partially as a narrator and makes his characters talk in a direct dialogue (mixed narration). In drama, the poet disappears behind his characters.

We find that scholars and critics differ when they define the nature of literary genres and when they show the elements and historical factors that led to their emergence. Talking about this problem, Tunisian critic Dr Abdul Salam Al-Misaddi indicated in his book *Criticism and Modernism* that the viewpoints of the question of literary genres are varied according to the criterion to which a critic resorts in determining the quality of a literary genre first, and according to the technical elements that distinguish one genre from another.

In general, we can discern three viewpoints or three basic trends in this field:

1) The Darwinian evolutionary trend.
2) The inner, aesthetic or linguistic trend.
3) The socio-historical trend.

We find in the first trend a mechanical attempt to apply Darwin's theory of Evolution to the question of literary genres. The French critic Ferdinand Brunetiere (1849-1906), is the most notable representative of this trend. He is also pro-Auguste Comte's school of positivism. He believes that the laws of evolution in the world of biology and flora have similar ones in the world of arts and holds that the literary kind is like the biological one, that comes into being, develops and finally comes to extinction.

Brunetiere's false theory of evolution was faced with sharp criticisms because it was seen as damaging to the science of species. He reached certain conclusions including that the sermons of preachers in the 17th century had after a period of interruption, developed into lyric poetry in the 19th century.

In my view, Brunetiere's basic virtue lies in the fact that he attracted attention to the importance of studying the question of literary genres. He showed that the natural approach to the study and examination of any literary text is to define, in the first place, its identity in the light of the premise of literary genres. But this trend lost its effect and gave way to the romantic attitude and the emergence of new trends.

As for the inner or aesthetic trend, it is mainly concerned with the formal and linguistic structure of literary genres. It is supported by various formal, aesthetic, metaphysic and linguistic trends which neglect the role of historical and sociological factors of the evolution of literary kinds. But these trends gave importance to the language and structure of literary genres. Some concepts of the inner or aesthetic trend associate the poetics of literary text with the essence of the literary genre.

In his book "an approach to architext" the French critic Jerard Genet lays stress on the examination and deepening of this trend. Right from the beginning, he declares, "the text is not the subject of poetics, but of the architext, that is to say the combination of general characteristics to which each text belongs separately. Of these kinds, letters, and other literary genres are included. Since Aristotle, Western poetics had endeavoured to make of these kinds a unified system capable of covering the literary field as a whole.

In a book entitled, *The Future of Litrerary Genres* Dr Mohammad Al-Hadi Al-Tarabulsi maintains that the problem of literary genres becomes secondary compared with the problem of the poetics of genres" Extolling the role of poetics in defining the essence of literary genres, he said that to rely on the types of literary poetics would save us any formal classification that does not highlight the particularity of the speech which we study."

Modern critical and literary studies abound in aesthetic, linguistic and psychological ideas and divisions on the levels of expression and structure. Some critics think that the use of pronouns and tenses would reveal a certain psychological meaning. Kinds of literature are thus seen as embodiment of the grammatical tense in the following order:

Lyric poetry : the present
Story and epic: the past
Drama : the future or present

As for the employment of pronouns, it is done in the following order:

Lyric poetry : I
Epic story : HE, SHE, IT
Drama: You

Thus, we find a tremendous interest in examining and studying the structural, generative and linguistic levels of literary genres. But the historical and social problems and semantic function of genres have not been given much attention. The literary phenomenon, in the view of the representatives of this trend, is governed by inherent or inner laws concerning the linguistic structure of the literary genre.

This widespread trend is almost the prevailing one

in the literary studies in the West. It depends a great deal on the ideal philosophical theories and trends in European thought, which were started systematically by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and later developed by Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, Croce and others. They also depend a lot on the results of modern studies in the fields of linguistics, stylistics and formalism.

Despite its formal extremism sometimes and its one-sided inclination, this trend has managed to shed light on important and basic inner aspect of the literary genre. But it is by itself incapable of answering all the serious questions raised by the problem of literary genres including the historical and sociological origins of literary genres and their expressive and aesthetic functions.

As for third trend, the socio-historical one, it gives particular attention to the discovery of the social and historical roots of literary genres, their development and lays particular stress on the implications and inner functions of these genres. *The Theory of Literature,* a book prepared by a number of Soviet literary critics, can be regarded as a representative of this trend in world studies, and *An Introduction to the Theory of Literary Genres* by Dr Abdul Mun'im Tlimah is a representative of this trend in Arabic literary studies. Alsberg holds that the historical approach in the theory of literature can take into consideration the emergence of literary kinds and genres as a response to the requirements of the situation, people's life and the psychological development of mankind. Great stress is laid on the idea that the semantic and implied nature of literary genres should be viewed as a way of developing the technical form of content in general. The idea was stressed by Kadchev and Kozenov who said, "any technical form is no more than technical content turned into something tangible."

Dr Abdul Mun'im Tlimah sees that 'the general principle of the development of literary kinds, their extinction evolution, change, history, incorporation into another literary kind is that every stage undergone by society embodies the aesthetic relations of this society with the world through certain literary kinds that suit the people's capability at a certain stage and the nature of their social system. A scholar would associate the emergence of literary genres with the social activity, stressing that the literary genre derives its essence from the practical and technical experiences in this situation. But, this gives rise to two important points: firstly, the capability of some works of immortality despite the extinction of a certain literary kind or its fusion with another one after the end of a certain historical situation which brought it about. Secondly, it emphasizes the principle of relative independence of literature and art from the social basis. This is because the particularlity of art does not make the artistic development including the evolution of kinds mechanically identical with the social development, though scientifically, the development of art is governed by the development of society."

There is no doubt that the attempt to develop a new method that can make use of all these theoretical approaches and trends would help, to a large extent, give full answers to the complicated questions brought up by the problem of literary genres throughout history without leading to selectivity. Such a complete method can take into consideration the historical, sociological and cultural basis of the literary genres and their development, and the study of their various semantic, aesthetic and psychological functions. It also can make use of the evolutionary concept within its reasonable historical context. At the same time, it is concerned with the study of the inner and linguistic structure of literary genres. Such an ambition is reached by many of the current critical projects and studies. The critic Graham Hugh calls for the creation of a new theory on literary kinds and genres, which can be more comprehensive than the old one, a theory that goes back to the profound bases of classification instead of attachment to historical events alone.

The question of literary genres seems more complicated and intricate when we try to apply it to Arabic literature, both old and modern. Old Arabic literature does not include such literary genres as epic and drama for example. The emergence of modern literary genres poses a fresh problem for scholars. As a result, we find differences and confusion in the judgements of many Arab scholars and the absence of a unified methodological attitude towards this dangerous cultural manifestation.

It seems that Arab scholars have not carefully studied this complicated problem facing Arabic literature. Most studies of old Arabic literature bear an academic or descriptive mark, and are not basically concerned with the study of this literature in the light of the theory of literary genres. As for modern critical studies, they are still limited and in need of further contribution by scholars and critics, on applied, theoretical and historical levels. Without such serious, joint efforts, the question of literary genres in Arabic literature will remain a daunting problem.

Perhaps, this problem arises from the fact that the theory of literary genres came out of a comprehensive exploration of the situation of European literature starting with the Greek era. In the light of this, the question of the three well-known literary kinds, epic, lyric poetry and drama, was crystallized. When it comes to the application of this theory, the Arab scholar chooses one of the following three attitudes:

The first attitude is represented in the attempt to apply this theory automatically. The second attitude is represented by most traditional and academic studies which are confined to what is superficial and casual about this problem. They even try to avoid it root and branch and study Arabic literature regard-

less of the theory of literary genres. The third attitude is represented by the attempt of a number of scholars and critics who try to break new ground in this respect, proceeding from the premise of literary genres, but it takes into consideration the particularity of Arab literary achievement in various ages. Even such a school is still at its early stage, its characteristics and achievements have not become fully clear. It requires joint efforts to attain good results that would acquire legitimacy inside the modern critical movement.

Dr Jawdat Al-Rikabi acknowledges that Arabic poetry belongs to lyric poetry and that epic poetry does not exist in our literature as it does in the west, though there are popular stories such as that of Antara and Bani Hilal and others. Our old Arabic literature, in the view of Al-Rikabi, has also not known epic poetry. But when he comes to talk about modern Arabic poetry and its new literary genres or kinds, he gives a strong opinion, saying that the poem of "free verse" itself, represents a new literary genre too. This is a mechanical application of the premise of literary genres since free verse will remain a natural development of the lyric poetry itself.

On the other hand, there is a descriptive and academic point of view which stresses the judgements of old Arab critics on the themes of poetry and its diverse kinds. This view which treats these themes as independent literary genres, is partly echoed by the Egyptian critic Mohammed Ghunaim Hilal who sees that the old Arab critic Qudama Bin Ja'far has the credit of studying the poetic genres. He even regards the traditional themes of poetry as literary genres and reviews the attitudes of Arab critics towards verse and its various subjects and themes, indicating that they are confined to lyric and sentimental poetry which cover panegyric, satire, elegy, boasting, blame, threat and apology.

In the light of the problem of literary genres, how should modern Arabic poetry be viewed? Although the modern Arabic poem is not homogeneous and it reveals immense variety of styles, techniques, forms and visions with no clear proportions of subjective or objective elements in the poem, it still represents one literary genre, that is the lyric. All branch varieties with which Arabic poetry is pregnant are no more than sub-divisions which we can call "species" belonging to a basic genre. This means that all the ramifications produced by the modern poem cannot be classified as an independent literary genre. This is because these sub-divisions will remain basically subject to the dominant voice of the lyric poet who governs the inner, structural, and semantic fabric of the modern poem.

However, we should acknowledge the fact that the lyric poem in question is no longer determined by the pure subjective or sentimental characteristics known as old Arabic lyric poem. Rather, it has become a sophisticated poem assimilating many of the other raw elements of other literary genres such as epic and drama. It has also assimilated many dynamic elements of other arts particularly painting, sculpture, music, cinema and has been influenced by the pressures of age and mass media. It is important not to confuse basic genres with secondary categories. This would help the scholar to produce a realistic scale of classification of all poetic and prose experiences, proceeding from the major literary genres: epic, lyric poetry and drama.

We find that the single literary genre is capable of generating a large group of branch species to meet the requirements of the social and cultural development in every period. Some of these species are superseded by new ones. But all of them bear the basic features of the same literary genre. So, all the poetic varieites in modern Arabic poetry can be traced back to lyric poetry. But this idea does not go for old Arabic poetry.

However, there is no denying that modern Arabic poetry has abandoned the premise of poetic themes. It has taken a definite shape in which all traditional themes were assimilated and all its new varieties come under one literary genre. The themes of elegy, love, satire, praise or political criticism, which can be found in modern Arabic poetry are no longer poetic themes by themselves but has become part of the fabric of the modern poem and of the attitude of the modern poet himself.

The capability of the Lyric poem to assimilate some elements of drama and epic such as conflict, narration, dialogue, multi-voices does not necessarily mean that it has become an objective literary genre and that it has lost its lyric essence. This is because the poet, in this case, presents what is objective and external through the focus of subjectivity. As for tragedy and great epic, in the opinion of Gyorgy Lukacs, they present the objective world, that is the external, together with the inner life of man only. His feelings and ideas reveal themselves in exploits and events, development interaction with the objective situation, i.e. the external. This is the division between the epic and drama on the one hand and the lyric poem on the other hand. In the light of this idea, the long poem cannot be considered a new literary genre, as some scholars and critics might think.

Some might say that some trends within the modern poem intended to elevate the objective elements and to weaken the subjective ones entitle us to talk about the capability of the rise of non-lyric poetical genres. For example, the call of some symbolist and modernist poets for dehumanization of arts almost scrap the presence of the lyric voice in modern poetry. The most prominent representatives of this call are Mallarme, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

The Sapnish philosopher Jose Ortega Y. Gasset called for ridding art and poetry of emotions and attacked romantic art and the music of Wagner who tried to express human emotions. He was in favour of the music of Dubois who, in Ortega's view, succeeded in making music free from human touch.

There is common view that the poem's "ego" is an objective "one" and has nothing to do with the "ego" in lyric poetry. It is seen as the "second ego" or the persons or mask worn by the poet. Others say once you say "I" you will talk about another "ego" However, despite all these tendencies in the poem, they will remain revealing hidden and unseen attachment to the lyric poem in its new form and in its new branch species which, in their turn, reveal disparity in the degrees and proportions of what is objective and subjective within the modern poem.

It seems that modern criticism emanates from a romantic attitude in inflating what is subjective and lyrical in lyric poetry. The French critic Vinson refers to the dangers of this. In his definition of lyric poetry, he said it is an influx of personal feelings with a personal theme in which the poet describes his psychological states, using "I " the pronoun used by the speaker, springing from the field of dreams, pains and joy." The attitude of the poet, in this case, he added, is negative, that is to say events influence him and not he who influences events.

Commenting on the romanticists' idea that lyric poetry is personal, that is to say revelation of personal feelings in verse, Vinson said that such definition is not comprehensive because it leaves out a number of literary works usually considered part of it. He sees that Greek lyric poets did not only show their personal feelings, but also those of society which regarded them as its mouthpieces. The critic indicates that in his poems, the poet Pindar scarcely talks of himself. The basic element in lyric poetry is not confined to the influx of feelings. It also covers the narration in verse of myths and legends relating to town people at times, and to the protagonist's family at other times.

All this indicates that the lyric poem accommodates many objective, narrative and epic elements, even in its old forms. So, it is no surprise that the lyric poem in our age becomes open to many of the features of other literary genres and assimilates them without losing its association with the original literary genre. However, this does not negate the presence of subdivisions which we used to term as literary "species" emanating from the literary genre itself.

The German writer Johanz Bisher associates the literary genre with its branch species, indicating that literary genres are capable of keeping their essence without this contradicting the possibility of the rise of literary species within the same literary genre or kind. The writer indicates that the literary kind is seen to ascertain its presence and keep its essence and that the various forms, the overlapping of genres and their supersession have not essentially marked literature at any time."

When we examine the new literary species, it is necessary to see them through their semantic, expressive and psychological functions. It is not enough to take one feature and talk about the birth of a literary genre or new poetic species. For example, we cannot regard the circular or prose poems as literary genres, depending on structure and rhythm. We also cannot consider the war poem as a literary genre, depending on its theme or basic value.

Proceeding from the foregoing points, we would like to emphasize that Arabic modern poetry will remain essentially affiliated to the genre of lyric poetry, though it has acquired new features. It has, in its turn, created a combination of modern species capable of development and extinction in compliance with the requirements of poetic expression and the evolution of human experience. But this does not negate the presence of other poetic species bearing the mark of the genre of lyric poetry.

These species include the short poem, long poem, mask or monologue, ballad, dramatic poem, epic poem, sectional or cluster poem and compound poem. These divisions are primary and not final. We have avoided the traditional viewpoint which takes poetic themes or subjects as a basis to establish literary genres or species and we have also avoided the criterion of form and external structure.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of the theory of literary genres in relations to our Arabic literature because it will remain the natural approach to understand and evaluate various literary works and experiences with a view to marking the definite features of the literary text and its problems.

Translated by Adnan Salman

1940s Literary Scene in Iraq

The following is an article by Mahdi al-Qazzaz published in al-Adeeb magazine in February 1944. The writer gives his opinion concerning the stalemate in the literary movement in Iraq during the 1940s. The article included references to a number of young writers then, who became among the well-known Iraqi men of letters later.

The article, however, prompted reaction and comments were written on what it referred to. In the coming issue we shall publish a translation of an article published in reply to this article. Another article in a third issue will deal with literary circles in Baghdad in the 1940s.

Writers and men of letters in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon have been writing about the literary life in their countries, the literary atmosphere men of letters enjoy, the common intellectual trends, as well as about the literary studies and books they issue and by which they serve their nation and country, thus creating a literary atmosphere and sharp mind among the youth of the nation.

Iraqi men of letters, meanwhile, have kept themselves remote from the scene. They have been indifferent to what is going on in the Arab world as regards literary and cultural affairs. They are not motivated to write, no matter how furious debates get among men of letters, intellectuals and philosophers.

The failure of Iraqi men of letters and intellectuals to contribute to intellectual matters and their isolation is not attributed to lack of literary material, immature culture, or shallowness. Men of letters in Iraq have had, in fact, genuine achievements in the fields of culture, thought and literature, both in Iraqi papers and other Arab papers. Their literary studies and poetry have appealed to Arab literary men and critics, which proves how sound is their thought and knowledge in literature, politics, and sociology. But these men of letters are inactive now. They are preoccupied with making a living. Fahmi Al-Mudarris, for example, who is well-known for his essays and studies in political education leads a retired life now. Mustafa Ali, a scholar of old Arabic literature and one of the writers whose studies are distinguished for their correct language and precise expression, has been satisfied with his job as inspector at the Real Estate Registration Department.

Similarly, Dr. Mustafa Jawad, a former student of Al-Karmali and well-known for his linguistic studies and critical essays on famous Egyptian writers and whose articles and books on language, literature, and criticism were published in *Al-Muqtataf* and *Al-Hilal* magazines, is now content merely to teach at the Higher Teachers' Training Institute.

Ibrahim Salih Shukir, owner of the newspaper *Al-Yaqdha, Al-Zaman* and *Al-Mustaqbal,* a political critic, and writer of interesting articles on literature and psycho-analysis is now content merely with his job at the Ministry of Education. He seldom goes out other than to coffee-houses as he is indifferent to the literary and political crises around him. Likewise, Mr. Ahmed Hamid Al-Sarraf, the writer of several studies on Al-Khayyam and Abu Nauwas, moving through the provinces of Iraq, oblivious of his responsibility to literature. The same goes for the rest of the writers and men of letters in Iraq who include lawyers, doctors and civil servants. Literature, to them, has become a diversion they indulge in and remember only occasionally. As for poets such as al-Risafi, Ali al-Sharqi, Al-Mallah and the two Al-Shibeebi poets, they have been almost forgotten. Their names are hardly mentioned except casually because they have become merely ordinary persons who are unaffected by the country's adversity and prosperity. Sheikh Ali Al-Sharqi, the bedouin poet, has isolated himself by taking up a job in the Appeal Court.

The poet Mahmoud Al-Mallah whose national poems about the ordeal of the Palestinians have echoed through the Arab world is silent now and is virtually forgotten, although the constitutional crisis in Lebanon shook him out of his dormant state and the angry poem he wrote then, was greeted with approval and joy. The only poet who remained on the literary scene after the others had left, is Al-Jawahiri, owner of the newspaper *Al-Rai' al-Am,* and his poems have been acclaimed by readers in Iraq and other Arab countries.

As we review the literary scene and men of letters in Iraq, it is worth mentioning Egyptian, Lebanese and Syrian writers' role in encouraging the literary movement in Iraq and creating a real literary atmosphere. The literary researches and studies they publish in Iraqi papers raise controversy and debate among Iraqi men of letters. However, this literary activity only lasts for a short period, after which our men of letters cool off and withdraw into their own shells.

It is also worth mentioning Mr. Mahmoud Subhi al-Daftari the current Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mr al-Daftari's literary salon is held on Fridays and is attended by the intellectual elite and leaders of the literary movement. Mr. al-Daftari is member of the Iraqi Senate Council and has a library replete with the rarest foreign books especially in Turkish, because of his Turkish education. He is one of the few individuals in Iraq who know about Turkish literature, its scholars, readers and the stages it has passed through till the present.

On Fridays, a group of writers, lawyers and educated youth frequent his house where they stay for three or four hours to discuss freely and openly general affairs and Eastern and Western literary movements. The influence of these weekly meetings is obvious on the Iraqi literary movement.

There are other literary clubs but their influence is insignificant in comparison with that of the al-Daftari Salon which is confined to an aristocratic literary elite.

I hope the reader will not think that the life we are leading must have dampened our spirit, debased our literary palate or cooled off our love for reading. We still read many Egyptian, Lebanese and Syrian magazines, and we eagerly seek them to read the literary studies, poems and stories in them. *Al-Adeeb* magazine is held in high regard by Iraqi men of letters and youth in view of its excellent literary articles and its views on literature, criticism and sociology.

Those of our senior men of letters who appeared in the wake of Turkish rule took part in the move towards independence during the mandate era by writing essays, poems, and books and thus creating a literary atmosphere which played an important role in guiding intellectuals and literary life then. This has very much influenced Iraqi youth.

Among senior Iraqi men of letters is Mehdi al-Baseer who contributed greatly to the literary revival and cultural independence, and who raised the position of Iraqi literature in the Arab world. Al-Baseer's national poems are often recited and sung by students everywhere. He obtained a Ph.D. degree in literature from Paris and was hoped that when he came back he would promote the cultural and literary movement in Iraq. Whereas when he did come back he just broadcast a few lectures on the French poet Corneille. Most educated Iraqis were still ignorant about some aspects of the life and poetry of al-Mutanabbi, Abu al-Ala', Abu Tammam, al-Buhtiri, Shawqi, Hafidh, al-Kadhimi, al-Habboubi, and al-Zahawi. So how could they have heard of Corneille if they had not yet read his poems or literary studies?

The secluded and lonely life our men of letters lead as well as the absence of any club to bring them together as is the case with their colleagues in the rest of the Arab world is the reason for the obscurity Iraqi literature is in now, after being well-known in the Arab world during the life of al-Zahawi and al-Risafi. It is also the reason why our men of letters took to indolence and contentment whereas a true writer must always be sensitive and alert.

One of the main factors which suppressed Iraqi literature is the social system which deprived Iraqi literature of inspiration, alertness, sensitivity and passion so that our literature became void of emotion and beauty.

Another factor is that men of letters hardly ever get together — as we said above. Everyone is busy trying to realize his own dream. The result has been the pursuit of material gains. If besides keeping their jobs, they contributed literature and culture we could understand their attitudes and accept their running after civil service jobs. A great number of Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian men of letters contribute a great deal to Arabic literature while occupying government positions. For instance, Taha Hussein, Zeki Mubarak, Ahmed Amin, Tawfiq al-Hakeem and other men of letters in the Arab world are civil servants. But besides their jobs they take part in the revival of literature and culture. They offer the speakers of the Arabic language a rich and varied cultural corpus, including stories, literature, arts and philosophy. But as soon as our men of letters take up civil service jobs they break off their relation with literature, end their contribution to any cultural activity and even start a new life which has nothing to do with their literary past.

Among the employees of the Ministry of Education there are doctors, teachers, lawyers, some of whom have higher degrees from European and American universities and who therefore should have had a great influence on translation, writing and on elevating literature and arts in Iraq. Unfortunately, none of them has produced anything for fifteen years now.

Amid this materialism, political conflict and party politics, a group of young writers has emerged in Iraq. To revive its literature they have published literary papers and magazines. Their passion for reading and literary studies has created a literary atmosphere rich with love stories, prose poems, criticism of Arabic books and translations of great European writers. Mr. Rafael Butti's paper *al-Bilad* has been a testing ground for young writers. They were therefore inspired to produce an Iraqi literature full of new spirit and passion.

Other magazine have also appeared such as *al-Wameedh, Atarid, al-Amani* and *al-Hasid.* Young writers compete with each other to write analytical studies, critical essays and poetry. No sooner does a book come out in Arabic or a foreign language than they start to review, discuss, analyse or even translate it. Mr. Butti rendered a great service to the literary movement then. He urged young writers to produce studies and critical essays and presented them with new publications so that they might read and write reviews on them. He also published a thick weekly issue of his newspaper on the line of the Egyptian literary supplement of *Al-Siyasa.*

Thus a good group of young writers appeared on the Iraqi literary scene. Their writings heralded a bright future, even became a challenge to the already established writers who did not acknowledge the newcomers.

Undaunted, the young writers went on turning out their cultural and literary products. The public received them with joy and relief hoping at the same time that this activity would continue and get better and richer.

Among the young writers who wrote literary studies and critical essays were Abdul Wahab al-Amin and Mahmoud Abdul Karim. In sentimental writings there was Lutfi Bakr Sidqi, and in translation Mousa Habeeb and Kamil Qazanchi. It was Mr. Rafael Butti who introduced these writers to the Iraqi public. Through his daily paper *Al-Bilad* and his weekly *Al-Akhbar,* Mr. Butti encouraged them to write and translate literary studies and analystic stories.

Other young writers who also made their literary contribution then were Dhul Noon Ayyoub, Abdul Fattah Ibrahim, and Abdul Haq Fadhil. They formed the vanguard of folk studies and progressive literature. Their profound studies conveyed the sufferings of the working people. Their views, and those of other writers who had similar studies were published in*Al-Majalla* and *Al-Ahali* magazines.

Apart from those writers there were others who wrote essays and stories such as Safa' Mustafa, Safa'

Khulousi, Sa'di Khalil, Gorgis Awwad, Yagoub Balboul, Salim Butti and other young writers who wrote stories and translated essays on literature, arts and the cinema.

Since their owners were writers or inclined to literature, we ought to mention here the literary papers and magazines which contributed to the literary revival by publishing stories and essays by these young writers. The wellknown *Al-Hatif* paper, owned by Ja'far al-Khalil, had been put to the service of literature and literary revival since its establishment, especially as its owner Mr.al-Khalil was a mature writer not attracted by life's material aspects.

Even though the paper's editors were obscure, its role in the literary revival was remarkable. Then there was *Al-Iraq* paper which was owned by Razzouq Ghannam and whose pages were dedicated to high-brow literature. Mr. Rafael Butti was Editor-in-Chief then but he soon parted company with them and established *Al-Bilad* daily and *Al-Akhbar* weekly. He encouraged young writers both materially and morally. He also contributed to the literary sections but not very frequently since he was in charge of the two papers. Unfortunately, he later became preoccupied with politics and party struggle so that he was no longer interested in the literary movement nor encouraged those young writers as before. Eventually his paper failed so often to appear that its young writers left, especially when *Al-Akhbar weekly* was closed down. They started to write instead in *Al-Ahali* paper which was owned by Abdul Qadir Ismail and Hussein al-Jamil. In this progressive paper readers became acquainted with Russian literature through translated stories and poetry by great Russian writers. The paper therefore was much in demand. However, for political reaons, the government closed down this paper and that group of writers broke up too. A group of them, nevertheless, published *Al-Wameedh* magazne, owned by Lutfi Bakr Sidqi and edited in collaboration with Abdul Wahab al-Ameen and some young writers. It was indeed a refined literary magazine which, through its four issues, rendered literature a genuine and memorable service. It so happened, however, that the magazine appeared at an inopportune time and, its owner was thus obliged to cease its publication. It was regrettable that this young magazine should die so soon.

Then another newspaper appeared; *Al-Kalam* whose owner was Mr. Abdul Wahab al-Salim. But no sooner had a few issues appeared than its owner found a job at the Ministry of Social Affairs and parted company with literature. He took charge instead of the in-coming and out-going correspondence at the Ministry.

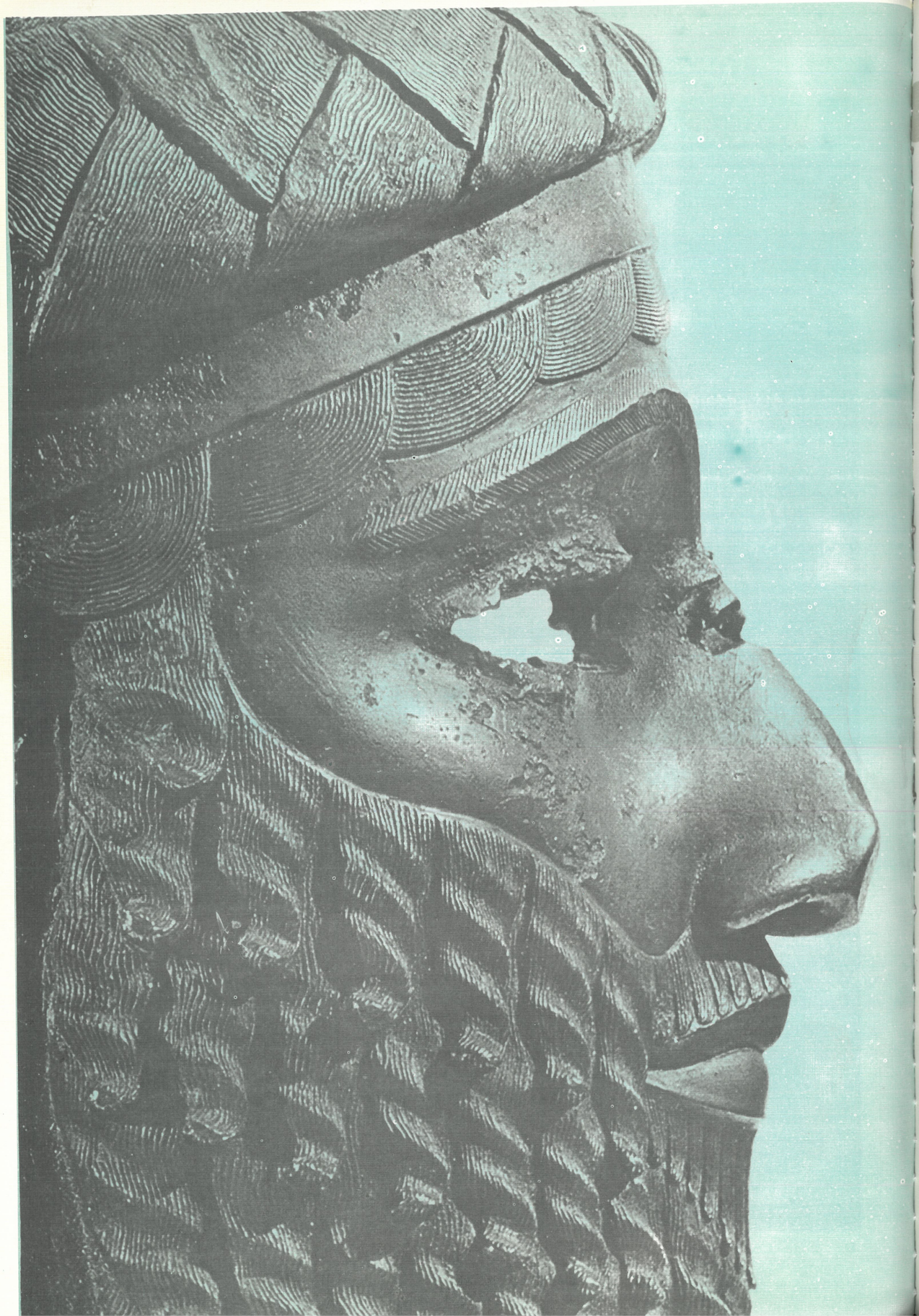
A group of young writers in Mosul established *Al-Majalla* magazine. It was edited by Abdul Haq Fadhil, Dhull Noon Ayyoub, Abdul Fattah Ibrahim and other writers. The magazine was published for sometime in Mosul before it moved to Baghdad, but it ceased to be published due to a shortage of paper.

There were also other newspapers which contributed to Iraq's literary revival such as *Al-Amani, Al-Nahdha, Al-Zaman, Al-Mustaqbal, Al-Hasid, Al-Anba and Al-Ra'e and Al-Am.* But eventually all of these newspapers and magazines ceased to appear for one reason or another.

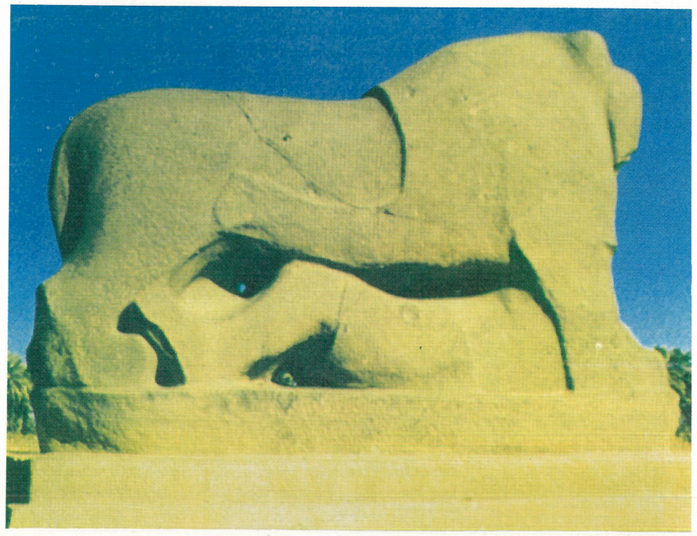
Among the young writers who stood out as successful translators and writers were Hussein Al-Jamil, Dhul Noon Ayyoub, Abdul Fattah Ibrahim, Abdul Wahab Al-Ameen, Abdul Haq Fadhil, Ja'far al-Khalil , Mousa Habib and Kamil Qazanchi.

This is only a quick review of the young writers who have helped to bring about a literary revival to our country. We have also mentioned the newspapers and magazines and their owners who fuelled this revival. When these literary newspapers and magazines died one by one and their owners turned to publicity and fame through political writings, these writers parted company and took up small jobs at government departments. Their voices were no longer heard except occasionally.

Translated ***by Suad Abid Ali***



Invitation to the "Gate of the gods"



The Lion of Babylon

The inhabitants of Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilisation, namely the Sumerians, the Akkadians, Assyrians and Babylonians were in the forefront of the people who contributed, from early times, to the making of human history. Babylon, in particular, was one of the famous centres of ancient civilisation. No other ancient capital enjoyed so high a reputation and position in human thinking and literature in both ancient and modern times.

The Iraqis, the descendants of those people, are shaking off the dust of some 3000 years of Babylon to introduce the old city to the world this year.

Babylon, some 90 kms to the southwest of Baghdad, will be the venue of the Babylon International Festival due to be held September 22 - October 22, 1987.

Historically the name Babylon was used to refer to the whole region which was called Babylon by the Greeks around the 2nd millennium B.C. It has, ever since, been mentioned in Greek and Roman documents as well as in Arabic literature in later periods. Originally, the city's name was probable Babilla or in other references Bab-ilim which both mean "The Gate of the god." Its European name Babylon is a Greek modification of the same name.

"It will not be one of these cultural festivals which are common occurrences in Iraq today. Rather, it is in appreciation of Babylon's role in Mesopotamian history and a revival of one of the ancient cities of the world," said Munir Bashir, head of Music Department at the Ministry of Information and Culture.

Unlike one-theme festivals, the Babylon Festival will be a multi-purpose occasion covering music, singing, drama, arts, equestrian games, fashion shows and handicraft exhibitions. In conjunction with the festival, international seminars on the contribution of Babylonian culture to the development of music will be organised.

It was decided to hold this Festival two years ago upon instructions by President Saddam Hussein to revive the glory of Babylonian civilisation. For this purpose, a higher committee was set up comprising the Minister of Information and Culture and directors of the departments of Music, Antiquities and Heritage Authority and the State Organisation for Tourism together with the Governor of Babylon.

These departments are now involved in a joint work at the site in preparation for the Festival. Baby-

Ishtar Gate, Babylon (580 B.C.)

lon is the birthplace of the first human legislation, arts, music and architecture. "It is high time we paid back at least some of the debt we owe to this city," said Mr. Munir Bashir.

"We are proud of this great city. This Festival is the Festival of the World, because we consider Babylon an international property," he added.

Work underway included two undertakings, preservation and restoration.Preservation work in Babylon comes within the Babylon Revival project which started in 1977.

It concentrated on restoring the basic features of the ruins.

History tells that Babylon was a city floating on subterranean water because of its adjacency to the Eurphrates. The efforts of the Antiquities and Heritage Authority teams were confined to the upper layer of the city which consists of remains of the Neo-Babylonian era. The underneath layers will be dealt with in future, according to the Revival Project plan.

Because mud bricks were used in construction, most buildings in Babylon could not survive the changeable weather conditions and needed constant repair.

The restoration in the ancient city covered the remains left by its last great King Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 B.C.) These included, the palace, the temples, the procession street and the Ishtar Gate. The Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar extended to the borders of Egypt. It became one of the richest lands in Western Asia, where trade and commerce flourished remarkably.

Nebuchadnezzar's Palace, also called the southern palace, is a rectangular building covering an area of 51,000 sq. metres. According to archaeological finds the Babylonian King had enlarged the palace. Several wings with hundreds of rooms and inner courts were built. They were beautifully decorated with colourful glazed-tile and bas-relief. Terrace gardens, called the Hanging Gardens in later accounts, were added.

Of the five courts being restored is the largest one called the Royal Court. This is the site for some of the Festival's activities.

"We re-built the fallen walls and erected new ones by using Babylonian bricks. Then the floor was paved with the same bricks," said Jawad M. Barih, from the Antiquities and Heritage Authority team working at the palace.

Referring to the Babylonian bricks, he said they are not much different from ordinary bricks we use today. They are a little bit larger. "A special plant producing bricks of the same Babylonian size and ingredients was set up for this purpose," he added.

Nebuchadnezzar devoted much of his time to building many temples throughout his vast kingdom. The restoration for the Babylon Festival covered Ninmakh, Ishtar and Nabushakkari who were the gods of Babylon.

The Procession Street was the main avenue in Babylon. It led along the eastern side of the city and crossed at the Ishtar Gate. Processions used to go through the street at the Babylonian New Year Festival. Fashion shows are organised in this street.

Repair work also covered the enormous Ishtar Gate with its world-renowned bas-relief tiles.

Most of the Festival's activities are held at the Babylonian Theatre. This amphitheatre was built during the campaign by Alexander the Great on Babylon (356-323 B.C.). The arena was originally used for wrestling and other public games.

The present rows of seats which rise above the level of stage in a half-circle, accommodate about 3,500 spectators. Eight rows were added with 2,000 seats. The theatre is equipped with up-to-date music control rooms and sound effects. The stage has been built so that large theatrical or music companies of up to 300 members can easily perform on it.

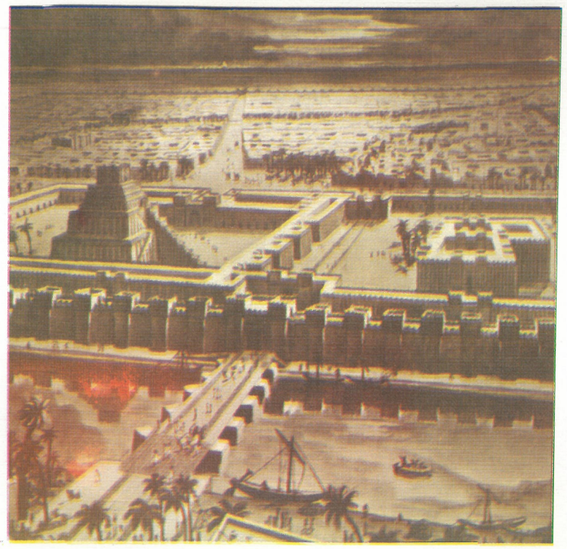
"We must be very careful in our presentation of the cultural and artistic activities. We must be selective so that all that is presented is a genuine reflection of ancient Babylonia," said Mr. Bashir who is in charge of artistic activities of the Festival.

Artistic companies from some 40 countries take part in the festival. Among them are the Leningrad Ballet from the Soviet Union, Opera Ballet from France, 4 harp players from Poland, Acrobats from China, Chamber music from the German Democratic Republic and Flamenco companies from Spain. In addition several Arab countries are represented through their folk troupes and music ensembles.

The State Organisation for Tourism (SOFT) has built a rest house on the site. Babylonian architectural designs are used in the building, overlooking the Babylon stream, — a tributary from the Euphrates. The rest house has a dome over the main hall. It is decorated with paintings and murals evoking Babylonian artistic remains. The rest house has also a shop selling Babylonian replicas as souvenirs.

Inspired by artistic exhibits at the Iraqi Museum Batoul al-Fakaiki, an Iraqi artist has designed bracelets, necklaces, earrings, mats and clothes and other items. They were displayed for sale in special shops.

Also, she visited nearby villages looking for handicraft of the same ancient design still made by local people.



A general view of Babylon as imagined by an artist

Exhibitions

Spiritual Rites

Two Iraqi artists Maha Abdul Karim and Ibrahim Rashid held their first exhibition at Baghdad Gallery. Eighteen paintings and 48 works of ceramics were displayed.

Rashid seemed to be mainly interested in drawing the primitive man surrounded by nature. His paintings also show considerable interest in exploring the unknown in such a way that the artist seemed to depart from the traditionally accepted norms of paintings.

In the same way, Maha Abdul Karim approaches her subjects but in fine pieces of ceramics. She tries todraw the attention of the viewer by a blend of her own vision and the world around her. As her works are mainly an embodiment of totems, the artist, in fact, seemed to assert the close relationship between past and present, the subjective with the spiritual. In brief, her works are far from traditional as she aims at aesthetic objectives.

Physicians-Artists

To celebrate the Arab Physician Day, the Arts Department held recently an exhibition of the physicians artists at the National Museum of Modern Art.

Sixty five works by Qutaiba Al-Shaikh Nouri, Khalid Al-Qassab, Ala Bashir, Nouri Mustapha, Kamil Al-Jawahiri, Falah Al-Jawahiri, Abdul Ilah Al-Hilli, Burhan Jabr, Adnan Al-Kanani and Amir Hassan were displayed. These works showed how different was each artist in treating his own subjects and themes.

Ala Bashir, for example, remained faithful to his own raven which is always present in his paintings. Khalid Al-Qassab, meanwhile, showed his ever increasing interest in impressionism and Falah Al-Jawahiri harped on the psychological condition as if he were really to mind the fact that art aims at exploring various aspects of life. The oil paintings of Amir Hassan take us to various Iraqi cities; Baghdad, Basra and many others. Along with Abdul Ilah Al-Hilli, one can simply say that the two artists have approached different aspects of Iraqi environment in a skilful way.

The Group of Four

Four artists, Mohammed Sabri, Fakhir Mohammed, Hassan Abboud and Asim Al-Amir held their fourth exhibition at al-Riwaq Gallery. The common thing between these four artists is that they are all young.

Mohammed Sabri's works are mainly symbolic. He pays great attention to the characteristics of his favourite subjects. Fakhir Mohammed, on the other hand, seems quite serious when he deals with his themes. He is also interested in creating a special system in which many subjects dominate his paintings.

Asim al-Amir gives a number of works in which details seem to vanish. His paintings are quiet and dominated by silence. Hassan Abboud, meanwhile, has achieved a major change in his career which he started a few years ago as a graphic artist. In this exhibition he had three oil paintings and two graphic works. He seems to be quite a competent artist in oil painting and his main theme is woman. His world is poetic full of happiness though sometimes seems to prefer symbolsim to any other school of art.

Composition, Dr. Qutaiba al- Shaikh Nouri

Yassin Shakir's Fourth Exhibition

After thirty years of dedication to art, Yassin Shakir held last June his fourth exhibition at al-Riwaq Gallery.

The 36 paintings showed how the artist developed from one stage to another. Oil paintings and sketches dominate the artist's works in which he tried to project in black and white man's daily sorrows.

Some of the artist's works show his fascination with nature where fields of beautiful onemones dazzle the viewers.

One could not also miss the artist's fine pieces in which his concern with local and popular themes is quite obvious. Aspects of the good old days are magnificently produced by the artist who seems to regret the lost world of childhood.

'Iraqi Eyes'

At the end of last May, Khalid Al-Askari held also at al-Riwaq Gallery his second exhibition in which 20 paintings were displayed.

In most of his paintings, Al-Askari seems to pay a great deal of attention to the portrayal of the basic features of environment, architecture and people. There were in his works, the typical Iraqi alleys, Basra Shanashil, old Mosul's lanes and windows. If the artist's works show how these features are recorded in his mind, they in fact tend to be almost photographic in certain cases. The same goes for his paintings of the marshes in which he tried to give the essence of that magic land in southern Iraq.

* At the end of the academic year, Baghdad Institute of Fine Arts held a comprehensive exhibition in which students' works of paintings, ceramics, handicrafts and sculpture were displayed. Most of these works, however, dealt with one main theme taken from the Iraq-Iran war.

Contemporary Sumerian Characters

Eight Iraqi ceramists held at the Orfali Gallery an exhibition of Sumerian characters made in contemporary techniques of ceramics. The eighty pieces of work were mainly produced by Sa'id Shakir, Mohammed Oraibi, Shinyar Abdulla, Turki Hussein, Nuha Al-Radhi, Tariq Ibrahim, Mahir Al-Samarraei and Valantinus as a guest.

Yassin Shakir with a painting

Cultural Season of Iraqi Writers' Union

It has now become one of the traditions of the Iraqi Writers' Union to hold cultural meetings every Wednesday evening with various poets, critics, writers and scholars lecture on different topics. Many people interested in cultural topics attend these meetings.

On April 15, a number of Iraqi poets representing different generations read their poems to the audience. The poets include Hamid Sa'id, Khalid Ali Mustapha, Amal al-Zahawi, Abdul Muttalib Mahmoud, Murshid al-Zubaidi and Abdul Mun'im Hamandi.

On April 22, Mrs. Nahida Abdul Fattah lectured on the art of al-Wasiti through Maqamat al-Hariri. The lecturer explained how the Maqamat (Assemblies) appealed to many artists because of their eloquent prose and figures of speech. Mrs. Abdul Fattah gave a thoughtful analysis of the drawings based on the stories of the Maqamat and pointed out to the relation between photography and the Maqamat.

On April 29, Mr Ali Al-Jabiri lectured on the ideology of President Saddam Hussein with special emphasis on its originality and close analysis of current events in Iraq and the Arab world.

Mr al-Jabiri explained how President Hussein's objective analysis of these events could open the way for further progress of both people and society.

On May 6, Iraqi poet Mohammed J. Shalash lectured on "The Problem of Tradition and Modernity in Modern Literature." In his analysis, Mr. Shalash stressed the fact that each term, tradition and modernity, has its own qualities. To support his analaysis, Mr Shalash cited a few examples from Arabic literature and poetry.

On May 10, story writer Mohammad Khudhayyir summarized his experience in writing, telling the audience mainly about his own ideas and conceptions of short story. He also drew a comparison between the short story and the novel. Mr Khudhayyir said that he has always been looking for something new, something unusual to express in his stories.

Wednesday evening lecture on June 17 was to mark Iraqi Press Day. The lecture was delivered by Mr Jameel al-Jiboori who was presented to the audience by poet Abdul Muttalib Mahmood. Mr al-Jiboori reviewed the beginnings of journalism in Iraq and the early journalists who laid down the basis of Iraqi press. Meanwhile, he pointed out the political, social and technical difficulties Iraq press went through till it reached its present decent position.

The lecture of June 24 was entitled "National Development Plans: Application and Dimensions" by Dr Isam Rashid Huwaish, who was introduced by Dr Ali Mirza. The lecturer examined national development plans in Iraq, pointed out the weaknesses in comparision with the national plans which appeared after the July 17, 1968 Revolution.

Wednesday, July 11th lecture was supposed to be by poet Abdul Razzaq Abdul Wahid on his experience as a poet. But as he was abroad then the poetry club hosted the Spanish writer Dr Luz Garcia Constantnon who talked about the Spanish poet Miguel Hernandez. Talking about the poet's life, Dr Garcia said he was born in 1910. She said that his first collection of poetry "Expert on Monos" appeared in 1933, then the others followed on: "The Ceaseless Thunderbolt," The Smell of Reed," "Man is Lurking" and others. The lecturer refuted the claim which some tried to establish after the poet's death alleging that he was ignorant. Dr Garcia said the poet was well-versed in language that he spoke French and tried to learn English in his last two years in prison.

The lecturer said that Hernandez's belief was close to that of Sufis. One may also detect elements of Existentialism which considers "that man's being in the world implies that he is (thrown) into a specific situation surrounded by death suspicion, guilt and anxiety. However Dr Garcia stressed that Hernandez did not study philosophy and did not know its theories.

Fiction-Writers Club

The recently established Fiction-Writers Club at the Iraqi Writers Union is trying to establish a new tradition with regards to fiction in Iraq. This is being achieved by organising symposiums specialized in the art of fictio, and by focusing on various story-writing experiences. The subjects of these symposiums include the art of fiction, the story-writing experiences, fiction and other arts, a book and a critic which focus on novels and stories recently published.

Cinema

Building No. 13

Iraq participated in Moscow International Film Festival with only one feature film *Building No.13.*

The film, produced by Babel Company and directed by Sahib Haddad, is a social comedy about some families who found that the building in which they live is haunted by some mysterious powers. Their life is threatened and made restless, but they discover that a gang was behind all what was going on. The gang wanted to buy the building and, as the proprietor declined the offer, they started to threaten the tenants.

The cast includes Rasim Al-Jumaili, Mohammed H. Abdul Rahim and Su'ad Abdulla.

Baghdad the Eternal City

Iraqi Cinema and Theatre Authority started to shoot a new Iraqi documentary, *Baghdad the Eternal City'.* '

The 25-minute long documentary, written by Ali Mehdi and directed by Falah Qassim, is about the new changes taking place in Baghdad in recent years. It also gives an idea of Baghdad in the year 2000.

Love and a Bicycle

Director Tariq Abdul Karim began work on this new feature film *Love and a Bicycle* which is based on a real story. Abdul Karim's first feature film was *'Salvation Hours'* which was almost biographical. The new film is produced by Iraqi Cinema and Theatre Authority.

Scenario Competition

Iraqi Cinema and Theatre Authority organised recently a competition in writing scenario for documentary films. 29 scenarios from all over the country entered the competition and the results were as follows:

- First Award : withhold
- Second Award: *Face to Face*' ' by Ali Jassim
- Third Award: *'Faces ... Peace in Iraq'* by Mohammed Al-Jaza'iri
- Fourth Award: *'Martyr in One Conscience'* by Hakim Madhloum

The following scenarios received a word of mention:

- *'It is Iraq'* by Mahmoud Al-Ghizai
- *'Because We Have Sparros* by Shahat Abdul Wahab
- *'Shehrazade Speaks'* by Mun'im Ahmed and Hikmat Al-Ni'aimi
- *'Iraqi Day'* by Imad A. Abbas
- *'Steps and Travels'* by Abdul Amir Shamkhi

The panel of juries included Messrs. Salah Al-Tuhami, Yassin Al-Bakri, Director of Cinema, Sami Mohammed, Cinema Critic, Ja'far Ali, Ahmed Fayyadh Al-Mafraji, Director of Researches at the Cinema and Theatre Authority.

A scene from Building No. 13

Theatre

Looking at the programme of drama performances in Baghdad during the first half of 1987 we may touch upon two major points: high productivity and the dramatists' enthusiasm. During the first half of 1987 which was as rich as of 1986 the National Theatre Company has staged a number of works in Baghdad alone.

Tiswahin (The Lady of the Marshes) written by Yousif al-Saigh is a poetic drama. It is originally written in the form of a poem. Bearing the components of a dramatic work it helped the director Sa'doun al-Ubaidi to treat it as a drama.

This poetic drama is not the first work in the field of poetry dramatization. In 1981, a stage performance of this kind was presented. The same kind of stage experiment was again presented in 1983; on the Martyr Day (1st December, 1983) a collection of dramatized poems had been staged.

Tiswahin was presented last May. It is a story which dramatically depicts an Iraqi woman who had spent most years of her life in one of the southern Iraqi marshlands. The play shows the leading role of the brave rural woman in promoting patriotism among her family members and villagers. With other fellow villagers, she takes up arms and confront the invading Iranian troops across the south-east border.

The Proud Country is another production of the National Theatre Company. It is also a play containing several poems. It was directed by Wajdi al-Ani and staged at the Theatre Club. The director successfully made use of the dialogues running throughout the poems. He managed for instance, to reshape Hamid Sa'id's poem in a form that underlines the dialogues. Names and the words such as "Wafiqa", "Basra" and "The Sons" were adapted as indicators to performing characters on the stage. Similarly the director undertook to synthesize the poems of Abdul-Razzaq Abdul-Wahid and Sami Mahdi.

Anton Chekhov's dramatic work *"Swan Song"* was also staged at the Theatre Club which is a affiliated to Cinema and Theatre Authority. *"Swan Song"* was directed and performed by the well-known Iraqi dramatist Sami Abdul-Hamid. It is worth mentioning that the director Abdul-Hameed had in his early years of artistic career in the 1950s produced this very play.

Director Sami Abdul-Hamid succeeded in performing the leading role in *"Swan Song"* for his ability to embody the agonies of the paly's protagonist who once, had been one of the celebrated stage actors. Moreover, the director employed a simple decor through which he could present the theme. As he could convey an image of the conflict to the audience in a clear and beautiful language.

Sharia' was presented on the stage of National Theatre on July 10, 1987. This play is written by Yousif al-Ani and directed by Dr Fadhil Khalil. A number of veteran and Young Iraqi actors and actresses performed in this play. The play handles a critical situation that threatens the lives of toiling Iraqi classes. *Sharia'* depicts a simple Baghdadi neighbourhood where people make a living out of hiring boats. Despite their individual differences they remain in solidarity in theface of coming danger represented by the arrival of public transport services in their neighbourhood. The director skillfully touched upon a number of social issues such as new methods of work and the necessity of adapting oneself to the modern social development. The director has relied on the social realistic method of stage direction to convey his thoughts and provoke the audience to react to the play.

Within the theatrical season of the Fine Arts Academy, the Greek poet Sophocles' *Electra* had been on stage. This prominent drama was directed by Dr adil Karim. A number of the academy's students participated in playing its characters.

The director has persistently worked at presenting the essence of events and stressing *Electra's* disire for revenge. The choir did not only sing in the play but also had its share within the whole frame of events. The director was very keen that his audience should be introduced to the basic ideas of the events.

The director, moreover, focused on the reaction to the murder. He made the performance more electrifying by the use of some dramatic efforts such as the palace's gate, the advertisements and the stage's setting.

Director Dr Adil Karim has successfully created a highly impressive work the play was performed by the undergraduate students of the Arts Education Department, despite the fact that drama is not a speciality of those students who faced the audience for the first time in their schooling life. Though lacking experience they achieved succeess and some of them were even competent. Thus Dr Karim intended to explore new talents in drama performance.

A jester's Life in Quamr Inn is a comedy adapted by Faris Jewijani from two Arabic and world dramatic texts one of which being Bertolt Brecht's. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle.*

This play performed by Al-Hadba Theatre Company in Nineveh belongs to those kinds of comedies in which the spectactors laugh at the performers' movements and gestures rather than at the contradictory actions or situations.

The Members of the National Theatre Company celebrated the Company's 19th anniversary last April.

The members of this theatrical troupe were first chosen from the graduates of fine arts institute and academy in addition to some well-known Iraqi dramatists who had joined the Company. At the beginning, like any newly-established theatrical troupe, the Company faced some technical and financial difficulties but then it could overcome them as a result of the government's support and help.

The Thieves at Our Friends' Village

Last July the Babil Company for TV and Cinema production hosted Sinbad Puppet Troupe at the Magic Lamp Cinema. The troupe presented its first production *Thieves at Our Friends' Village* which was written by Assim al-Khayyal, and directed by Hussein al-Ansari. The parts were played by Waleed Khidhir, Muqdad Hassan, Mohammad Abdul Rahman, Anwar Mohammad, Anwar al-Tayyib, Sabah Kadhim and others.

This troupe was established in the early 1987 and it includes a group of students from the Academy of Fine Arts.

The actors were convincing to the young audience. This was obvious in the direct and rapid interaction between the children and the show. The direct dialogues made the children participate in the show. As a result the children took in the ideas the actors intended to put across. The programme of this fledgeling troupe includes *A Baghdadi Night, The Hat* and *The Conceited Frog*.

As for TV activity the troupe, at present, is working on a play entitled *The Hatchet and the Wood Cutter* which deals with the idea of work.

A scene from Sharia' play directed by Fadhil Khalil

Television

"Hard Times" is a new TV drama to be shown on Baghdad TV very shortly. The 23-part drama, written by Adil Kadhim and directed by Imannuel Rassam tells the story of a number of Iraqi people in old times and how those people looked for a new life.

The cast includes famous Iraqi actors and actresses like Yousif Al-Ani, Khalil Shawqi, Rasim Al-Jumaili, Samar Mohammed and others.

"Wa Mu'tasima" is another TV drama about a historical battle between the Arabs and the Romans. The 13-part drama is directed by Mohammed Yousif Al-Janabi and written by Ma'adh Yousif. A good opportunity for viewers to see a great deal of Arab heroism.

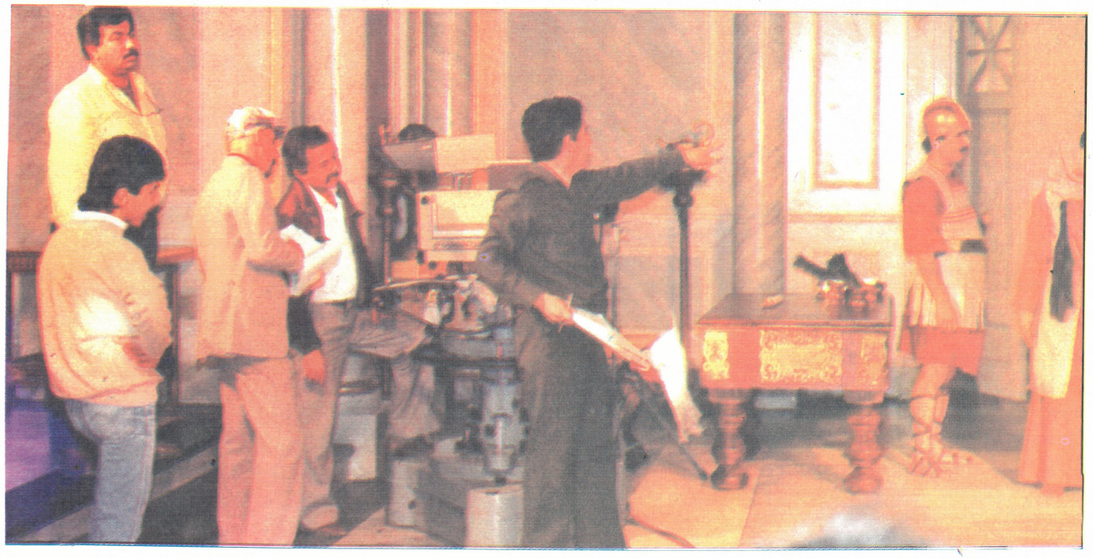
A Woman Says no Amidst Silence is a new drama which tells the story of a female doctor dedicated to her job. Working in remote provincial hospitals, she faces a lot of challenge and difficulties. Notwithstandingly, she has the stamina to continue her work and serve the people she began to love. The drama is written by Sabah Atwan, a prolific dramatist, and directed by Salah Karam. The cast includes Hind Kamil, Sami Kaftan, Ahlam Arab and Fawziya Hassan.

Vigorous Things is another TV drama written by Sabah Atwan and directed by Hassan Husni. It shows both aspects of life: good and bad where hope dominates the characters as they struggle to build a new way of life.

During the last few months studios in the Radio and TV complex in Nineveh witnessed various TV activities. Among these activities was *"They Don't Like the Moon"* a TV drama written by Adnan Haddad and directed by Khaleel Ibrahim. The screenplay was written by Badri Hassoon Fareed. It narrates one of the achievements of our soldiers as they defend the homeland and fight the aggressive regime of Iran. A group of fighters are assigned to carry out an operation within the enemy's territory. They are ordered to discover the enemy's positions and spot its movements. In the course of this mission the Iraqi soldier displays rare and exceptional courage in defending his land, history and heritage.

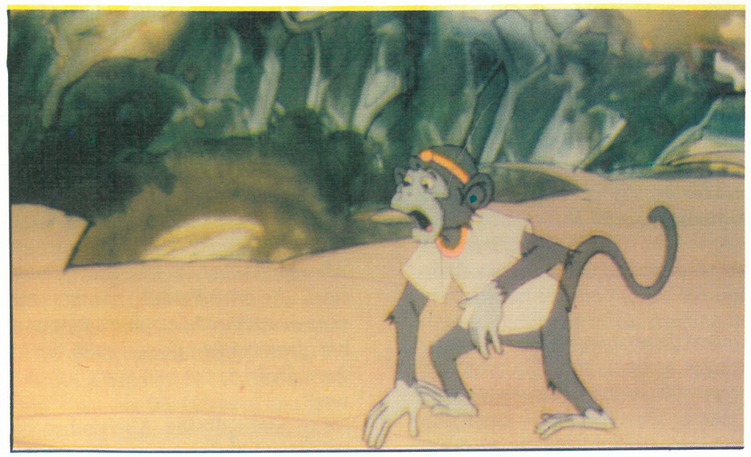
The parts are played by Ghazi Faisal, Sundus Saifullah, Abdul Razzaq Ibrahim, Talal al-Husseini, Husam Fadhil, Fareed Abdul Lateef, Yousif Sawwas, and Hassan al-Sa'igh.

Ta'meem TV started the production of *The Song of Ugliness'*, a new TV series in seven episodes. A number of actors from Arbil, Suleimaniya, and Ta'meem take part in the series. The series deals with human values in Iraqi society.



Director al-Janabi (centre) giving his instructions for shooting "Wa Mu'tasima"

Iraqi Animated Cartoon Film



Nadeem Muhsin has finished the basic drawings of a new Iraqi cartoon film which lasts few minutes. The cartoon is produced by Baghdad TV.

The film tells stories from the world of childhood through a series of drawings of animals. Mr Muhsin carried out these drawings in a new style that helps the child to participate, imagine, and meditate on human life and its value. Mr Muhsin has participated before in several shows besides his distinguished drawings in the two junior comics; Majjallati and al-Mizmar.

Concerts

On May 24 and 25, the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra gave its second concert during the current musical season. The concert featured two players among many others, Beatrice Ohannessian (Iraq) who played Khachadourian's piano concerto and Mrs. Svitlana Ivanova who played Rococo variations by Tchaikovsky. The two solo players presented a good performance although the two pieces are considered difficult compositions, in view of the technique they involve.

The third concert was given on July 7 also on Rashid Theatre. It included stringed instruments with the orchestra besides three wind instruments namely two horns and one oboe. The programme included Baroque compositions such as concerto No. 6 by Corelli and classical compositions by Mozart such as Divertimento No. 2 and Griek.

Among the most prominent pieces in the concert was a violin and stringed instrument concerto by Bach played by Hungarian player George Pero.

The last concert of the current season was held on July 19 on Gilgamesh Hall at Babylon Hotel. The concert marked the anniversary of the July 17 Revolution. The programme included two pieces by Hussein Qaddoori: "Mother land" and "The Victory March" as well as symphony No. 29 by Mozart.

The Second Seminar on Fiction

The Second Seminar on Fiction was held in Arbil capital of the Autonomy Region of Kurdistan (2-3 June, 1987) at the invitation of Saladdin Universitv and in coordination with the Literary Critics' Association in Iraq and the Union of Kurdish Writers.

The first Seminar on Fiction held ten years ago, was an important occasion for Arab and Kurdish story writers and critics to review the development of fiction in Iraq in those years.

During the opening session of the Second Seminar, Dr Ali Jawad al-Tahir was elected unanimously chairman of the Meeting.

The meeting included three sessions.

The first session took as its theme "Criticism and War Story." In his research paper "Critical legitimacy of War Story", Mr Hamza Mustafa tried to give a definite idea of criticism of war story during the last seven years. "Structure ofConsciousness in War Novel" by Abdullah Ibrahim indicated that war literature is generally based on two intellectual attitudes towards war. The first one shows war as a factor of destruction of civilised premises while the second attitude condemns war and supports man in his defence of his country and its values.

The critic Sulaiman al-Bakri pointed out in his research paper "The Realistic Trend in War Story" that the war story is not disconnected with the Iraqi story in general; it is an extension of it with some difference in the experience undergone by the writers.

The research paper "Iraqi War Story Between Clarity of Goal and Confusion of Views" by Dr Salim Al-Hamdani, showed that the Iraqi sotry has coped with the Arab struggle and embodied the war issue.

During the second session, light was shed on the contemporary Kurdish story, its roots, trends, and its most notable writers through four research papers.

In a research paper headlined, "A Question of Conscience, a New Look", Dr Abdullah Al-Dabbagh made an attempt to evaluate Ahmed Mukhtar Al-Jaff's novel "A Question of Conscience". The novel was seen by Kurdish researchers and critics as the source of the modern Kurdish novel.

Dr Nafa' Aqrawi gave in his research paper "History of the Kurdish Fiction" an exploration of the beginnings of the Kurdish story, saying that the Kurdish fiction writers were influenced by Arab and Turkish writers. He also talked about the motives which inspired them to write story.

In a research paper entitled, "Features of Modernity in Modern Kurdish Fiction" the critic Hassan Al-Jaff explored the roots of the Kurdish story, folklore and modernity.

The critic Delshad Mariwani talked about "The Panorama of the Birth and Development of the Kurdish Fiction" (1925-1958).

The third session took "The Trends of Iraqi Fiction Criticism" as its theme.

Dr Ali Jewad Al-Tahir indicated that Mahmoud Ahmed Al-Sayyid was the pioneer story writer in Iraq. The critic Fadhil Tahmir's research paper was a serious attempt to examine an important and expressive technical manifestation in the Iraqi novel, that is the shift from the one-voice novel to the multi-voice one.

Dr Abdul Ridha Ali tried in his research paper "Nazik Al-Malayika as a Story Writer" to prove that Al-Malayika, known as a poetess and critic, was a story writer as well.

The critic Basim Abdul Hameed Hammoudi gave a study of a critical book entitled "Fiction Literature in Iraq" by Abdul Qadir Hassan Amin. He emphasized its importance in the course of history and crystallization of fiction criticism in Iraq.

In his research paper "Estrangement in the Iraqi Novel", Dr Sabri Muslim tried to trace the history of the term estrangement, indicating that it has a psychological and social origin.

The participants in the Seminar came out with a combination of recommendations, the most important of which were:

* Efforts should be made to hold further seminars on Iraqi fiction.
*The research papers and studies presented during the Seminar are to be published.
* The Seminar gives strong support to interaction between Arab and Kurdish writers in organising literary meetings and seminars.
* The Seminar calls on all cultural and academic institutions to give further support to Arab and Kurdish story writers and critics.
* The Seminar stated the importance of publishing story collections by Arab and Kurdish writers to promote the unity of national culture in Iraq.
* The Seminar recommended the publishing of a special book on the literature of Mahmoud Ahmed Al-Sayyid, the pioneer story writer in Iraq, on the 50th anniversary of his death.

Hattin Symposium

On July 1, Arab Historians Union, in conjunction with Ministry of Information and Culture held a symposium in both Tikrit and Baghdad. The symposium marked the 800th anniversary of Hattin Battle in which Muslim Arabs led by Saladdin defeated the European Crusaders.

The 3-day symposium was attended by a great many Arab historians and intellectuals who contributed with 30 researchers and essays.

The objectives of Hattin Symposium aimed at exploring the positive and bright sides of the history of Islam and the Arabs, in order to confront the challenges the Arab nation is facing now. The current situation is similar to the circumstances which the Arab nation went through just before the Hattin Battle . The Arab nation, then was the target of two foreign invasions. The first was from the East whence the Mongols advanced over-running the Iranian territories towards Iraq. The second was the Crusaders' invasion from the West.

Many Arab and Iraqi historians presented to the symposium their researchers which dealt with the bright sides of this great Battle. The following are some of the prominent ones:

— Victory factors in Hattin Battle
— Iraq and Hattin
— The liberation of Jerusalem and Syria during the Hattin Battle.
— The historical dimension of Saladdin's victory in Hattin.
— Features of Hattin Battle plans.
— Jewish Economic Support for the Crusaders.
— Learning from the strategic victory of Hattin Battle.

The 800the anniversary of Muslim Arabs' victory in Hattin coincides with our victories now against the aggressive regime of Iran. The circumstances of the Arab nation during the Hattin Battle were similar to the situation now as we are fighting against a racis' regime. Commemorating Hattin Battle is a celebration of Arab fortitude and characteristic skill in liberation battle. It is this same skill that we have been drawing on as we confront our enemies.

The following are some of the lectures which dealth with Hattin Battle and Saladdin:

During the morning session which was held on July 1st Dr. Duraid Abdul Qadir delivered his research "Victory Factors in Hattin Battle." Dr. Abdul Qadir said that Saladdin considered fighting the enemy everybody's duty and that the leader was entitled to fight whoever failed to fulfil this duty. Dr. Abdul Qadir also pointed out that Saladdin's liberating zeal was not meant to achieve any expansionist ambition, for Saladdin himself stressed "We want to overpower and not possess these cities."

In this way he could unite his people against the enemy whom he prepared to fight 12 years before hand. Meanwhile he succeeded in establishing a vast and new state.

Among the victory factors the lecturer referred to is preparation for the battle, the choice of appropriate timing, supplying arms, training the forces and fixing a centre for the command which was Damascus then. Saladdin did not want to be the first to start the war. He waited for the appropriate chance to swoop on the aggressors. By relying on mobilisation, emphasizing the importance of ammunitions, raising the morale and by patience and steadfastness Saladdin won Hattin Battle.

In his research, Dr. Farooq al-Omar wondered why some historical personalities were subject of emphasis more than others. As he moved on to Saladdin's personality he said: "He had a fighter's personality fit to be copied by commanders and leaders. The noble objectives he achieved made him a personality that makes history, because he combined the wisdom of old men and the keenness of youth."

Both Dr. Hashiim al-Mallah and Dr. Ahmad Hasso pointed out in their research papers that the decisive victory of Hattin was partly due to an information policy pursued by Saladdin. Acting like a shrewd statesman he employed all the victory factors and put them at the service of the cause of the nation. In drawing up his information policy he was motivated by his principles and his faith in the cause of the nation. Therefore people responded to his policy readily and zealously.

When Saladdin recruited information the term was not common though its implications and principles were well-known. He pursued this policy by meeting writers and discussing with them means of mobilising the masses and preparing them for the battle. Meanwhile he was on good terms with the leaders of the nation such as judges, poets and writers.

This research was followed by a discussion on the terms the Franks and the Crusaders and which of them to be used. Mr. Abdul Wahab al-Ramadhani who raised the question, pointed out that the term

Crusaders was a new term used in Europe whereas our history books used the term The Franks.

Speaking of sects, Dr. Ahmed al-Hasso said that Saladdin's genius lied in the fact that he was against sectarian tendencies. The great problem to him was fragmentation. Therefore he aimed at unifying the region and the nation and recruiting the effective elements for the battle.

The research of Staff Colonel Salim Hamida stressed that Hattin Battle represented the best Arab battles against the Crusaders. The Crusaders were forced by the military genius of Saladdin to fight in a region where he wanted them to and where they sustained heavy losses and lost the battle.

Dr. Swadi Abid Mohammad analysed Saladdin's plans and discussed the possibility of learning from them and evoking them in our modern battles. He pointed out that as a military leader Saladdin left a rich legacy of military plans and subjects which could be a source of inspiration to Arab leaders. They have remained relevant and most of them became bases for military development in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the Islamic countries of Maghrib in the period following the Ayyubid rule.

Abdul Jabbar Naji described Hattin Battle as the key to all Islamic conquests. Saladdin's victory in Hattin paved the way for conquering further regions.

The researcher discussed the state of political fragmentation prior to Hattin and how Saladdin turned it to unity and strength to confront the enemy. He also talked about Saladdin's military mobilisation, his exploration and investigation of the region, his choice of leaders and his sound military planning.

Dr. Mohammad al-Mash-hadani's research "Jewish Economic Support for the Crusaders" covered the Jews' hostile attitude towards the Arab nation since time immemorial and till now. He said that their hostility had been obvious through their alliance with Arabs' traditional enemies in particular the Persians in the East and the Europeans in the West. Not a single historical event has passed without meeting a hostile Jewish attitude, that added to their previous aggressions. Long ago they allied themselves with the Persian King Cyrus who burned Babylon. And after the emergence of Islam they took an antagonistic stand against the Islamic revolution and its leaders.

Dr. al-Mash-hadani reviewed some aspects of this support as revealed through history books which confirmed the Jews' role in this war, in particular Iranian Jews. They supported the Crusaders more than other oriental Jews, aligned themselves with the Mongols, and conspired with the extremists of al-Ismaeliya to assassinate Sultan Saladdin in 1174 (570 Hegira).

Dr. Khashi' al-Maadhidi's research "Iraq and Hattin" was on Saladdin's life and the Crusaders. He drew a comparison between the plight of the Arab nation at the present and the circumstances of the Crusaders and the emergence of Saladdin. He stressed Iraq's leading role in Arab revival past and present.

Dr. Mahmood Yassin al-Tikriti's research "Social and Cultural Dimensions of Saladdin's Policy" focused on the role of the social environment, the Ayyubid family and Saladdin's personal talent, genius and bravery in his rise to power. Dr. al-Tikriti said that it was by virtue of his father's up-bringing and political circumstances that Saladdin's personality later assumed its leading role. Then the lecturer reviewed the historical challenges which the Arab nation faced then and Saladdin's part in dealing with them.

The research by Dr. Mahmood Sa'eed Omran of Egypt "Saladdin: from Alexandria to Hattin" attributed the initial success of the Crusaders to Arab fragmentation and the Crusaders' intention to make the most of it. This was obvious in their attempts to conquer Egypt and isolate it from the war. So, the twelfth century witnessed 25 attempts to invade Egypt. As for Saladdin's victory, he said, it was due to many factors such as knowing his enemy, being aware of the circumstances of the war he dragged his enemy to, uniting the nation against the aggressors as well as his own good military sense.

The importance of Arab poetry as a guiding element for the historian was dealt with by Dr. Hadi al-Nahar in his research "Hattin in the Poetry of the Crusades." He defined the role of poetry in the following points:

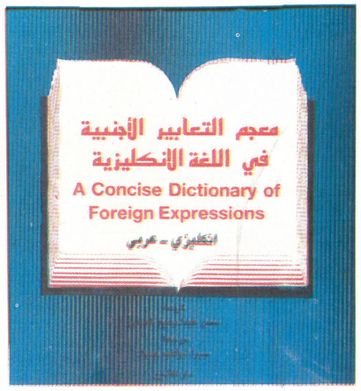
* Raising morale and calling for unity to recover the land and expel the aggressors;
* Recording battles and great events;
* Calling for continuing the struggle against intruders and aggressors,
* Glorifying bravery.

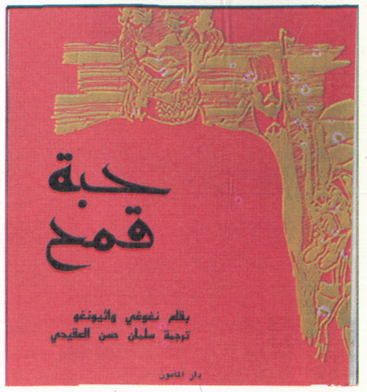
Dr. al-Nahar said that the poems of that period gave an accurate account to battles and events and celebrated its commanders and soldiers. So their images of the events in Tabariya, Hattin or Jerusalem turned out vivid. They followed up all the stages of te battle especially as most of those poets took part in the war and lived the experience.

The researcher concluded that Hattin brought drastic changes. It renewed Arab life, released potentials, and introduced the idea of unity to a fragmented Arab situation. Hence Hattin's share of poetry has been ample whether before the battle, during it, or after victory.

In the final session, on July 3, the Minister of Information and Culture expressed his appreciation of the researches as well as scientific and cultural efforts of the participants. This effort, he said, represented, in these circumstances, a new addition aimed at releasing the nation's potentials, and recalling elements of the past to instill life into the painful present of the Arab nation.

New Books and Publications





During the last three months, hundreds of books came out of the press here in Baghdad. These books, published either by the Cultural Affairs Department, Dar Al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing or private publishers.

Dar Al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing is a major Iraqi publisher which translates and publishes works in a dozen foreign languages. It also publishes major and important works from foreign languages into Arabic. These works include poetry collections, short story volumes, novels, literary criticism, plays, art criticism and dictionaries.

Zwiebelkeller und andere deutsche Erzahlungen

This volume of short stories, translated from the German by Dr. Sami Hussein Al-Ahmadi and published by Dar Al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing, gives a panoramic view of modern German short story. Besides, the writers portray various images of German way of life, in an informative and meticulously written stories. There are Ulrich Becher, Gunter Grass, Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht, Martin Bauber, Heinrich Boll, Wolfgang Borchert, Hans Bender, Friedrich Durrenmatt, Herbert Eisenreich, Herbert Heckmann, Friedrich Huch, Franz Kafka, Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Kurt Tucholsky and several others. They have all created a medley of dazzling variations. By wedding the new pscyhology to tight plots, melodramatic adventures, jagged coincidences and surprise endings, they achieved a particular and celebrated perfection. Romantic themes like suspected innocence, power of love and friendship, interwine with such realistic ideas as divided self, conscience, quest of identity and awakening. All is produced in a fine Arabic translation and controlled style.

A Concise Dictionary of Foreign Expressions

This dictionary, compiled by B.A. Phythian and translated by Samir Abdul Rahim Al-Chalabi is the most recent publication of Dar Al-Ma'mun. The 3,000 entries in this newly published translation comprise a collection of the most common foreign words and phrases occurring in everyday English and English literature, together with their pronunciation, language of origin and, frequently, notes on their usage. The collection reflects the origins of modern English, its subsequent international nature and the history of Britain which have all contributed to the frequency with which foreign words and expressions are found in English. The present collection is drawn mainly from a group of words and expressions that are sometimes recorded in English dictionaries with a clear, often typographical, indication that they are not yet assimilated into English. Along with these words and expressions there are a few 'transit' words that still have enough of their original flavour for the general reader to expect to find in the dictionary.

A Grain of Wheat

Arabic translation of African literature, particularly novels, are rare. Dar Al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing has now produced a fine Arabic translation of *A Grain of Wheat.*

In this novel, the Kenyan writer is mainly concerned with the political life in Kenya before independence. He chooses his heroes from ordinary African people who live in small villages and characterised by their human attitude. The white man, on the contrary, is portrayed as representative of the colonial administration. He is either narrow-minded or brutal when he deals with the black Africans. However, the novelist sympathizes with the white men who have come to Kenya for work only and who are not involved in colonialist politics.

**The Point and the Circle*

Here is a book about modernity in Arabic literature. The author, Tarrad Al-Kubaisi, gives a thoughtful analysis of a number of topics that have recently dominated Iraqi and Arab literary circles. What are the aspects of modern Arabic poem? How does a poet look at liberation movement in the Arab world? What are the origins of modernity in Arabic literature? These are some of the questions the author poses in the book. He tries to give definite answers where other critics have failed.

The book is published by the Cultural Affairs Department.

** Attempts to Study the Sociology of Literature:*

In this book, Dr Nouri Hammoudi Al-Qaisi traces various subjects from the point of view of sociology. He examines the popular sira (biography), travels and some topics related to the art of poetry.

** Taha Baqir - His life and Works*

This is an authentic book about the life and works of the late Iraqi archaeologist Taha Baqir. The author of the book, Dr Fawzi Rashid, explores various aspects of the life of a distinguished person who dedicated his life to archaeology. Dr. Rashid also examines Baqir's well-known works like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *An Introduction to the Ancient Iraqi Literature.*

The book is also published by the Cultural Affairs Department.

** Baghdad in the Eyes of Poets*

The Iraqi Academy has done well when it published this useful book about Baghdad and how it is viewed by poets. The author Jamal Eddin Al-Alousi explores various aspects of this historical city especially its contribution to civilisation and important role throughout the years. There is a fine blend of historical facts and poetry in the book.

** The Novel in Iraq 1919 - 1965*

Dr Najim Abdulla Kadhim traces in this book the origin of the Iraqi novel taking into account the early successful attempts of writers such as Sulayman Faydhi, Mahmoud Ahmed Al-Sayyid, Dhul Noon Ayyoub and Abdul Haq Fadhil. The author also examines the works of Dr Shakir Khisbak, Abdul Malik Nouri and Fou'ad Al-Tikarli who belong to a later generation.

** Tropics of Criticism*

This book, written by Fadhil Thamir and published by the Cultural Affairs Department, explores some aspects of critical problematics in Arabic literature in general and Iraqi literature in particular.